



**Rhode Island Department of Health  
Strategic Plan for Health and Wellness of Rhode Islanders  
with Special Needs, Disabilities and Chronic Conditions  
2013-2018**

**INTRODUCTION**

In Rhode Island, similar to the rest of the nation, one in five (20.2%) residents have disabilities. Rhode Islanders with disabilities demonstrate lower levels of employment, income, education, utilization of preventive health care, health and wellness, and greater participation in health risk behaviors compared to people without disabilities and chronic illnesses. There are also higher rates of disabilities among racial and ethnic minorities. In order to realize its vision-- "all people in Rhode Island will have the opportunity to live a safe and healthy life in a safe and healthy community" --the Rhode Island Department of Health ("HEALTH") desired to engage in a structured approach to improve the health and wellness of persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions and eliminate health disparities among Rhode Islanders.

HEALTH's Division of Community Family Health and Equity (DCFHE) aims to achieve health equity for all populations, through eliminating health disparities, assuring healthy child development, preventing and controlling disease and disability, and working to make the environment healthy. The Division's six teams (Health Disparities and Access to Care; Healthy Homes and Environment; Chronic Care and Disease Management; Health Promotion and Wellness; Perinatal, Early Childhood, and Adolescent Health; Preventative Services and Community Practices) promote synergy, collaboration, and coordination among programs with the goal of achieving health equity. The Health Disparities and Access to Care Team within DCFHE, is organized to address populations experiencing health disparities as a result of race or ethnicity, education, gender, sexual orientation, language, disability status, geographic location or any combination of these.

HEALTH's Disability and Health Program ("DHP"), based within the Health Disparities and Access to Care Team has been charged with facilitating the promotion of health and wellness of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions and the reduction of health disparities between Rhode Islanders with and without disabilities. With a grant from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") and with Title V, Maternal and Child Health funds from the federal Department of Health and Human Services, the DHP has initiated several efforts under its charge. The DHP and the Disability Community Planning Group (DCPG) and the Office of Special Needs ("Office") undertook a strategic planning process to address three core priority areas: integration policy and sustainability; health promotion, and emergency preparedness. With this intent, the DHP staff and the DCPG Advisory Committee seek to update, revise and extend the 2007-2012 Strategic Plan to this current document.

For each core priority area, the Plan includes a sub goal, objectives, outcomes and action steps. The DHP will implement the Plan over the 2013-2018 state fiscal years (July 1 – June 30) through measurable objectives to be set forth in annual work plans. In establishing annual work plans, the DHP will consult with the Office, the DHP AC (DCPG) and other health initiatives and programs in HEALTH, as appropriate, and will consider available resources and other factors, such as information obtained from prior year's activities. The DCPG will monitor the DHP's implementation of the Plan.

The *Plan's* effectiveness will be measured in several ways.

- Positive changes in health indicators for Rhode Islanders with disabilities and a reduction in disparities regarding health risk behaviors between Rhode Islanders with and without disabilities.
- Available, timely, and relevant data about the health and wellness of Rhode Islanders with disabilities to assist in the planning for and implementation of services and supports for people with disabilities.
- The impact of emergency preparedness action steps will be measured by positive changes in the number of Rhode Islanders with disabilities using local or state registries and participating in other emergency preparedness efforts.

## **Strategic Plan for Health and Wellness of Rhode Islanders with Special Needs, Disabilities and Chronic Conditions**

**Goal: Promote the health and wellness of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions, and eliminate health disparities between Rhode Islanders with and without special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.**

### ***Section I: DHP Integration***

**Sub goal: Quality data analysis on health indicators, access to preventative screening and other risk factors for Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.**

*RATIONALE:* HEALTH collects, analyzes, and makes available data on Rhode Islanders' health status using national and state-specific tools. With timely data and information, policy makers and public and private entities may be more effective in fostering improved health and wellness among Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.

**OBJECTIVE 1: To assure, maintain, and improve the quality of data and information about the health and wellness of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.**

#### *ACTION STEPS:*

- Assess current sources of data and information relative to Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.
- Obtain qualitative and quantitative information on the impact of disabilities and chronic illnesses on Rhode Islanders.
- Assess Rhode Island primary and specialty health care facilities for accessibility to persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.

#### *OUTCOMES:*

- More accurate and relevant data about the number of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.
- Timely and relevant data on health indicators for Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions and the disparities in these indicators between Rhode Islanders with and without disabilities.

**OBJECTIVE 2: To integrate the unique needs of people with special needs, disabilities or chronic conditions in all HEALTH programs in policy and practice.**

#### *ACTION STEPS:*

- Identify existing speakers' bureaus related to disability issues and collaborate to

develop a coordinated, comprehensive, and active speakers' system.

- DHP will collaborate with HEALTH programs on inclusive programming and policy, especially public health screening programs, programs of health promotion and wellness, and public health communications.

*OUTCOMES:*

- An established speakers' bureau related to disability issues to provide technical assistance to HEALTH and community programs on including persons with disabilities.
- Inclusive public health policies in the areas of screening, health promotion and communications.

## ***II. Health Promotion***

**Sub goal: Health promotion activities include Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions and reflect their health-related concerns**

*RATIONALE:*

Health promotion entails encouraging individual healthy lifestyle behaviors and affecting policy changes that support healthy lifestyles and healthy environments. Many leading health indicators continue to show a disparity between Rhode Islanders with and without disabilities. There is a need, therefore, to ascertain specific health concerns and barriers to healthy lifestyles among persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions and to assure these are addressed in health promotion efforts. Persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions need to be involved in the identification of needs and barriers. Health promotion materials must provide a current and accurate representation of persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions in order for health promotion efforts to be meaningful.

**OBJECTIVE 1: To foster health promotion materials that address health related concerns of, and appropriately depict, Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.**

*ACTION STEPS:*

- Make available evidence-based health promotion intervention materials on topics relevant to the health and wellness of persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions, including on healthy eating, smoking cessation, substance use, physical activity, mental health, etc.
- Collaborate with HEALTH's health promotion staff to modify existing health promotion materials and/or develop new materials based on comments from Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.
- Distribute disability-sensitive health promotion materials to individuals through health care providers and organizations, such as physician offices, Office of Rehabilitation Services, centers for independent living, schools, rehabilitation services, group homes, work-site wellness programs, etc.

*OUTCOMES:*

- Increased access by Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions to health promotion materials and evidence based programs that address their concerns and provide user-friendly information.
- Decrease the disparity between people with and without disabilities on indicators of health and wellness (i.e., smoking rates, physical activity, etc.).

**OBJECTIVE 2: To encourage accessible health and wellness activities throughout RI.**

*ACTION STEPS:*

- Identify and make available (electronically and in hard copy) the Rhode Island public and private recreational and fitness facilities for accessibility to and inclusion of persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.
- Develop and distribute a resource guide of available, accessible public and private recreational and fitness facilities and health promotion activities.
- Promote information and education programs for professionals (e.g. school nurses, teachers, transition coordinators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, case managers, etc) on promoting healthy lifestyles for persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.

*OUTCOMES:*

- Enhanced ability of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions to make and implement healthy lifestyle choices.
- Expansion of number and type of professionals able to assist Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions to adopt healthy lifestyles.

***Section III. Emergency Preparedness***

**Sub goal: A statewide, coordinated emergency preparedness system addressing concerns of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions in all phases of emergency preparedness.**

*RATIONALE:* In an emergency, the concerns shared by all Rhode Islanders are heightened for Rhode Islanders with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Through the four phases of emergency preparedness --planning, mitigation, response, and recovery-- efforts are undertaken to address these concerns in a variety of situations (hurricanes, terrorism, pandemic flu, etc.). HEALTH's Center for Emergency Preparedness joins other public and private entities, including the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency, the Domestic Preparedness Subcommittee under the Lt. Governor's Emergency Management Advisory Council, the Red Cross of Rhode Island, and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, among others, to plan for and respond to emergencies throughout the state. Each group has initiated efforts to assure that emergencies do not have disproportionate adverse

consequences for Rhode Islanders with chronic conditions special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.

**OBJECTIVE 1: To foster state policy that reduces adverse effects of emergencies on the health and wellness of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions including a centralized process for developing, sharing, and coordinating information and efforts.**

*ACTION STEPS:*

- Identify, in consultation with health insurers and others, policies/regulations related to the ability of persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions to obtain necessary supplies and equipment (e.g. medications, medically necessary diets, and durable medical equipment) throughout all phases of emergency preparedness and recommend changes that allow individuals access to needed items.
- Assure coordinated planning and communication on emergency preparedness and the needs of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions between and among various entities involved in emergency preparedness.
- Provide first responders and emergency preparedness personnel with disability specific training and strategies to communicate with persons with special needs, disabilities, and chronic conditions in an emergency.
- Create opportunities for Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions to participate in emergency preparedness efforts (as committee members, drill participants, etc.) throughout the state.

*OUTCOMES:*

- Increased registration of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions in the Rhode Island Special Needs Emergency Registry (RISNER).
- Increased number of adopted emergency preparedness plans and exercises that include Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions in all phases of emergency preparedness.

**OBJECTIVE 2: To foster individual responsibility and capacity for emergency planning by Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.**

*ACTION STEPS:*

- Distribute, to public and private entities and to individuals, tools (registry forms, information packets, etc.) that assist individuals to prioritize and take responsibility for their physical, emotional, and behavioral needs before, during and after an emergency.
- Offer information and training on promoting individual responsibility to plan for and respond to an emergency to professionals throughout the state working with Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions.
- Promote individual emergency preparedness for people with special needs,

disabilities, and chronic conditions through state agency partners (especially BHDDH, DCYF and DHS).

- Increase community/neighborhood awareness of needs of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions before, during, and after an emergency.

*OUTCOMES:*

- Increased availability of information for Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions to plan for emergencies and to manage their needs before, during, and after an emergency.
- Increased public understanding of the specialized needs and resource requirements of Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions during emergency planning, mitigation, response and recovery.

### **SUMMARY**

This *Strategic Plan for Health and Wellness of Rhode Islanders with Special Needs, Disabilities and Chronic Conditions 2013-2018* establishes a multi-year roadmap for the DHP. It also can serve as a guide to other public and private entities within Rhode Island. The DHP looks forward to working with these entities and with persons with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions to implement the Plan and to realize each of the sub goals within it. As with any roadmap, the *Plan* sets out a clear course of action, but must remain flexible to account for unforeseen challenges. The DHP's intent is to confront each challenge with commitment to the *Plan* and to assure that Rhode Islanders with special needs, disabilities and chronic conditions are positively affected by its efforts.

**Approval:** This document was approved by the Disability Community Planning Group on April 25, 2013 and covers the period July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2018.