

USU's Center For Persons With Disabilities To Collaborate On Mental Health Grant | CPD Blog

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A collaboration between Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities and its counterparts in Alaska and Kentucky will offer training for self-advocates, family members, direct service providers, and mental health and healthcare professionals to provide quality mental health services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The 3-year, \$2.1 million project is being funded by the Administration for Community Living.

The CPD and its Alaska and Kentucky counterparts are all University Centers on Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, and are part of a nationwide network of centers that provide training to professionals in the disability field.

The Mental Health and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities National Training Center will offer an extensive online training portal, in-person trainings at major conferences, and an on-site leadership institute for other UCEDD staff and trainees. Continuing Education Units and Continuing Medical Education credits will be available.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience mental illness at the same, or higher, rates as people without IDD, yet are less likely to receive treatment. This is due in part to perceptions among service providers that people with IDD will not benefit from treatment.

"The fact of the matter is that many parents, service providers, and healthcare professionals still don't understand that people with disabilities can struggle with the same mental health challenges as everyone else," said Dr. Matthew Wappett, Executive Director at the Center for Persons with Disabilities. "Just because a person has Down syndrome or autism doesn't mean that they don't also have depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues."

"We're also trying to inform direct service providers in varying communities," said Ty Aller, a training coordinator for the national center and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. "Training for professionals often doesn't specifically address the needs of individuals with dual diagnosis, IDD and mental health conditions—and information on the best practices for care are often unavailable to providers and families as well. ... This education doesn't reach a lot of providers, creating a deficit that we are trying to fill. If everyone gets the same information, we can hopefully work together systematically to make a real difference."

Dr. Karen Ward, Director of the University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development, has worked with people with IDD and co-occurring mental illness for more than 30 years.

"One young man was admitted to our psychiatric institute involuntarily, but was not allowed to participate in the treatment program because of his intellectual disability," Ward said. A right-to-treatment suit was filed, and a specialized treatment clinic was created, but there are still limited mental health services for this population, Ward said.

The project's objectives, according to Dr. Elaine Eisenbaum, Training Director of the University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute, include development and provision of comprehensive, evidence-based, trauma-informed, culturally responsive trainings and resources for individuals with IDD, families, direct support professionals, mental health and healthcare professionals, and other community service providers.

"People with disabilities deserve the same access to mental health care that is available to those without disabilities," Eisenbaum said. "Ultimately, our goal is to ensure that people with IDD and co-occurring mental illness get the services they need in order to live the lives they desire in the community."

For more information, contact: [Matthew Wappett](#).