

Success Stories

from the Montana Disability and Health Program

Promoting Inclusive Cancer Control in Montana

Public Health Issue

One in seven Montanans have a disability. A Montana DPHHS 2020 Surveillance Report found that people with disabilities are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer (14%) than those without disability (6%). For colorectal cancer, routine screenings of adults 50 years or older could prevent 60 percent of deaths. However, people with disabilities are less likely to receive recommended cancer screenings. The disparity can be related to a lack of disability representation in public health planning that leads to gaps in education and awareness, communication barriers, transportation challenges and limited accessibility to screening sites.

Program Overview

The Montana Disability and Health (MTDH) Program recruits, trains and supports Disability Advisors who provide technical assistance and infuse disability inclusion and wellness goals in public health planning at state and local levels. The Montana Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (MCCCP) is a supporting partner to the Montana Cancer Coalition (MTCC). The MTCC is a diverse group of individuals and community organizations that work to reduce cancer incidence, morbidity and mortality across the cancer continuum. A significant role of the MTCC is to develop, implement, promote and advocate for the Comprehensive Cancer Control Statewide Plan. As a member of the MTCC Steering Committee, the MTDH Disability Advisor is involved in all aspects of planning, implementation and advocacy, giving a voice to people with disabilities across Montana.

Making a Difference

The MTCC is increasing the use of public health data collected with people with disability in its planning and program implementation activities. MTCC is partnered with Montana Centers for Independent Living and developmental disability organizations on MTDH Accessibility Ambassador projects to improve the accessibility of cancer screening sites statewide and increase awareness of the Accessibility Standards for Diagnostic Medical Equipment and related policy practice. The MTCC also collaborates with MTDH and its partners to support health education programs and campaigns, such as the CDC Right To Know Campaign, Women Be Healthy workshops, and health care literacy campaigns to improve patient advocacy skills and supports with people with disability. The MTCC members also support Sun Safety education at Special Olympics Montana Healthy Athletes events and other targeted and inclusive cancer control campaign strategies.

To learn more about MTCC and its strategic planning process to ensure a better quality of life and enhance the odds of survivorship, view the nationally recognized video, featuring former MTDH Disability Advisor, Kathie Bach and other cancer survivors as well as members of the partner organization, the Montana American Indian Women's Health Coalition, available at: <https://mtcancercoalition.org/about/>.

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Photo of Stacey, her service dog and her friend, Mark Horner. Photo credit: Tom Bauer

"I am a cancer survivor and a person with an intellectual disability (ID). It is important to have a Disability Advisor on the MTCC so there is a voice for people with disabilities. In my role on the steering committee, I have been able to educate others on the fact that people with ID need to be asked questions that they can understand so they can give correct answers and get the screening they need. If I was not asked those questions, they would not have found the colon cancer at an early stage and I would not be here today."

~ Stacey Johnston-Gleason, Ronan resident & MTDH Disability Advisor since 2020.