



INDEPENDENT



APRIL, 2023

YOUR INDEPENDENCE IS OUR MISSION

A Letter From the Director

In 1983, RCAL, through the perseverance of Joan Gunderson, was created and began assisting individuals in Ulster County and working with Individuals with disabilities, business's, and other social services type agencies. 40 years later, we are solidifying old relationships. From our wonderful community partnerships with Mid-Hudson Valley Federal Credit Union and FALA Industries to our continuing work with Family of Woodstock and the Ulster County Office for the Aging, RCAL is working with the community to assist it's residents. We are proud to have received many awards and recognitions throughout the years. We are proud to be a recent winner of SUNY New Paltz University Community Impact Award. I was honored to receive it as a part of the inauguration ceremonies of Dr. Darrell Wheeler as the new President of the University. This Year we are partnering in new ways with members of the community including Cross Point Fellowship, St. James Church and Harambee. We are excited to be bringing to Ulster County new events like a Disability Resource Fair in the Fall, a Dinner Celebration, and an open house BBQ on June 14th. More details to come in future emails.

-Anthony Mignone

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NEW YORK ASSOCIATION ON INDEPENDENT LIVING (NYAIL) BUDGET ADVOCACY-STATUS OF PRIORITIES

HERE AT NYAIL WE HAVE BEEN URGING BOTH THE LEGISLATURE AND GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL TO SUPPORT OUR PRIORITIES. BELOW ARE A FEW OUTSTANDING ISSUES IN THIS YEAR'S BUDGET

INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL) FUNDING

NOT INCLUDED IN EITHER HOUSE BUDGET. BOTH HOUSES INCLUDED THE 8.5% COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA) FOR HUMAN SERVICES AGENCIES, WHICH DOES NOT INCLUDE INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS (ILCS).

HEALTH/MEDICAID

MEDICAID REDESIGN TEAM II (MRT2) ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING (ADL) ELIGIBILITY: THE SENATE FUNDS REPEALING THE "ASSISTED DAILY LIVING ELIGIBILITY" CHANGE WITH \$277M. ADDITIONAL SPONSORS HAVE SIGNED ONTO THE BILL REPEALING THIS HARMFUL REDUCTION IN ELIGIBILITY FOR HOME CARE BUT INCLUSION IN THE BUDGET WOULD BE IDEAL.

CONSUMER DIRECTED PERSONAL ASSISTANCE (CDPA):

○ ASSEMBLY AND SENATE BOTH REJECT THE EXECUTIVE'S PROPOSAL TO REPEAL THE FISCAL INTERMEDIARY (FI) PROCUREMENT PROCESS.

○ ASSEMBLY AND SENATE REJECT THE EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL TO ELIMINATE WAGE PARITY PROVISIONS FOR CDPAP.

FAIR PAY FOR HOME CARE, MAINTAINING AND INCREASING HOME CARE WAGES

○ ASSEMBLY: REJECTS THE EXECUTIVE'S PROPOSAL TO DECOUPLE THE MINIMUM WAGE INCREASES FROM THE HOME CARE MINIMUM WAGE. THE ASSEMBLY ALSO SUPPORTS THE CONCEPT, THROUGH THEIR RESOLUTION, PROVIDING OVERSIGHT OF INSURANCE COMPANY CONTRACTS TO THE COMPTROLLER, AS WELL AS OTHER CONCEPTS TO HOLD INSURERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR DISTRIBUTING PUBLIC FUNDS.

○ SENATE: REJECTS THE EXECUTIVE'S PROPOSAL TO DECOUPLE THE MINIMUM WAGE INCREASES FROM THE HOME CARE MINIMUM WAGE AND ADDS \$2 IN INCREASES, \$1 PER YEAR IN 2024 AND 2025. ALSO REQUIRES THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DOH) TO MAKE STATE-DIRECTED PAYMENTS TO PROVIDERS FOR THE PURPOSES OF SUPPORTING WAGE INCREASES AND ALLOW THE COMPTROLLER TO REVIEW CONTRACTS BETWEEN MANAGED CARE ORGANIZATIONS AND LICENSED HOME CARE SERVICES AGENCIES, FIS, OR ANY AGENCIES SUBJECT TO THE HOME CARE MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE.,

MEDICAID BUY-IN:

THE SENATE SUPPORTS THE GOVERNOR'S PROPOSAL IN THEIR ONE-HOUSE BUDGET. THE ASSEMBLY PROPOSES TO MODIFY THE EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE LIMITATIONS ON MONTHLY PREMIUM PAYMENTS, AT 8.5% IN LINE WITH THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT PREMIUMS. WE'RE VERY PLEASED THAT ELIGIBILITY IS VERY LIKELY TO EXPAND IN THE FINAL BUDGET PROPOSAL.

HOUSING

ACCESS TO HOME IS INCLUDED IN BOTH HOUSE BUDGETS. THE ASSEMBLY INCLUDES A \$1 MILLION INCREASE, AND THE SENATE INCLUDES A \$3 MILLION INCREASE! STILL SHORT OF OUR REQUEST OF \$10 MILLION, BUT A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT.

EMPLOYMENT

55-B AND 55-C: THE ASSEMBLY REJECTS THE EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF POSITIONS IN THE 55-B PROGRAM FROM 1,200 TO 1,700 AND TO AUTHORIZE THE TRANSFER OF EMPLOYEES IN 55-B OR 55-C POSITIONS WHO MEET MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO COMPETITIVE CLASS TITLES WITHOUT EXAMINATION. THE SENATE ACCEPTED THE PROPOSAL AND WE HAVE ADVOCATED FOR THE INCLUSION OF THE PROPOSAL IN THE FINAL BUDGET.



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Earth Day 2023 - April 22

Making Nature More Accessible to All

By Erin Vallely, ATI Advocacy Specialist



As we celebrate Earth Month and Earth Day this April, people are encouraged to go outside and enjoy nature. However, disabled and chronically individuals are frequently left out of outdoor recreation campaigns and cannot access local opportunities to enjoy nature. Outdoor gear companies rarely show visibly disabled and ill people in their ads, hiking trails and campsites don't offer accessible accommodations, and outdoor space designers frequently focus on aesthetic rather than functionality. So, what can people do to make nature more accessible?

- Ensure nature and outdoor recreation websites are accessible and include accessibility information upfront
- Renovate trails to be smoother and wider to accommodate wheelchairs while maintaining space for other people to safely pass, and add benches along trails so people can rest
- Update lodges, information centers, bathrooms, picnic areas, lookouts and campsites so they comply with federal standards at a minimum
- Invest in adapted recreation equipment and training for staff on how to modify activities and experiences to meet people's different abilities
- Create an advisory committee of multiply disabled and chronically ill individuals to help assess your accessibility for different types of needs and develop improvement plans.

Photo credit: Mohawk Preserve



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NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ENCOURAGES NEW YORKERS TO PREPARE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH INSURANCE RENEWALS

ALBANY, N.Y. (March 23, 2023) – The New York State Department of Health today announced that beginning this spring and continuing through spring 2024, more than 9 million New Yorkers enrolled in Medicaid, Child Health Plus and the Essential Plan will need to renew their health insurance. Enrollees in these public health insurance programs have not had to renew their coverage since early 2020 due to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) continuous coverage requirements. However, the December 2022 federal Consolidated Appropriations Act included new rules ending the continuous coverage requirements starting Spring 2023. These new federal rules now require states, including New York State to begin redetermining eligibility for public program enrollees in the Spring of 2023.

“The end of the public health emergency does not mean a downshift in public health,” NY State Medicaid Director Amir Bassiri said. “It is our top priority to reinstate eligibility reviews in a way that to retains coverage for as many enrollees as possible and limits coverage gaps, particularly for vulnerable populations dependent on services. It is the right of every New Yorker to have access to insurance, and we remain committed to keeping this right intact.”

Renewal notices will be sent to enrollees in these programs by NY State of Health, the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), and local Departments of Social Services beginning spring 2023, which will include the deadline for an enrollee to take action to renew their insurance or risk having a gap in coverage. Renewal notices will be sent on a rolling basis and renewal deadlines will be based on the enrollees’ enrollment end dates and will range from June 30, 2023, through May 31, 2024. Consumers are encouraged to renew by the 15th of the month.

To prepare for the transition out of the PHE, the Department has spent the past year reviewing federal guidance; developing plans to enhance information technology systems, augmenting resources and staff; engaging a public education and outreach campaign; and collaborating with state and federal government officials, local departments of social services, partners, advocates and other stakeholders to educate New Yorkers about the important changes coming to their insurance programs.

“Eighty-three percent of the population being redetermined are enrolled through NY State of Health, New York’s fully-integrated health plan marketplace,” said NY State of Health Executive Director, Danielle Holahan. “NY State of Health has been working for the past year to educate the public about these changes. We are prepared to assist enrollees in navigating the steps to renew and have systems in place to transition individuals who are no longer Medicaid-eligible into the Essential Plan, Child Health Plus, or a Qualified Health Plan.”

As New York prepares for the transition from the PHE, the availability of affordable coverage has remained critical. PHE related flexibilities as well as enhanced federal tax credits has made coverage even more accessible and affordable helping to cut New York’s uninsured rate in half since the passage of the Affordable Care Act 13 years ago, today.

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NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ENCOURAGES NEW YORKERS TO PREPARE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH INSURANCE RENEWALS (CONTINUED)

The impact of PHE provisions has been vast, with nearly 50 percent of New York's population enrolled in public health insurance. The State has made adjustments to ensure as many enrollees as possible retain eligibility. Premium contributions for children with incomes up to 222 percent of the federal poverty level were eliminated in CHP, and the Medicaid income eligibility levels were increased for individuals with disabilities and those over age 65. The State has also requested permission from the federal government to administratively redetermine eligible individuals with disabilities and those over the age of 65 who have Medicaid through local departments of social services. New York's Essential Plan for low-income individuals will smooth the transition for New Yorkers who no longer qualify for Medicaid and enhanced federal tax credits will make coverage more affordable for individuals transitioning to a Qualified Health Plan.

Additionally, the State is proposing an expansion of its Essential Plan in January 2024 to make health insurance more affordable for low-to middle- income earners. Essential Plan coverage has no monthly premium or deductible and very low-cost sharing; expanded Essential Plan coverage would have a \$15 monthly premium.

New York's Medicaid program operates in three eligibility systems. Each of these systems has different timing for issuing renewal notices, which will be sent out monthly based on the enrollees' enrollment end dates.

1. NY State of Health, the State's official health plan Marketplace, processes MAGI-Medicaid cases administered by the State, as well as all eligibility determinations for Child Health Plus and the Essential Plan.
2. The New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) serves New York City counties.
3. Local Departments of Social Services encompass all counties outside of New York City.

Notices will include the deadline to renew with first discontinuances of coverage effective for all eligibility systems starting in July 2023.

In an effort to minimize the number of New Yorkers at risk of being disenrolled, the Department of Health has spent the past year engaged in continuous outreach, including a robust public education campaign with paid advertising, option to receive text notifications about renewals, an informational consumer webpage, and an online Communications Tool Kit to be shared with partners, providers, advocates and stakeholders to help educate consumers about these changes.

Tool Kit resources include:

- Communication tools and templates, available in 14 languages, including a poster, fact sheet, infographic, pre-written social media posts and images, ad campaign videos, drop-in articles and drafted email blast messages.
- Infographics describing the renewal process of each eligibility system.
- PHE unwind letter for partners.
- Fact sheets detailing public program enrollment by county and Congressional District.

For more information or questions about eligibility reviews and the renewal process, consumers should reach out to the NY State of Health Customer Service Center at 1-855-355-5777 or to their local Department of Social Services office, or learn more on the NY State of Health website and the Department of Health's Medicaid website. Both sites are updated regularly.



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Support Groups

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION

Ulster County

Hybrid Caregiver Support Group

Alzheimer's Support

Group: Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month from 11:00 am – 12:00 pm.

Facilitator: Tara DeLuca

Mid-Hudson Limb Loss:

Meetings are held on the last 4th Thursday of each month from 6:00-8:00 pm.

Facilitator: John Vacca

Traumatic Brain Injury:

Meetings are held on the second Monday of each month from 2-3pm.

Facilitator: Stephanie Jackson

11 a.m. to noon
the third Wednesday
of every month
either via Zoom
or in-person at
Resource Center
for Accessible Living
727 Ulster Ave.
Kingston

Starting March 15!



Sharing your feelings and experiences as a dementia caregiver with others who understand can help everyone who participates in our caregiver support groups.

Our support groups are free and open to the public.
Call 800.272.3900 for information.

Looking to volunteer? RCAL invites individuals interested in starting/facilitating a new support group to reach out!

This program is supported in part by a grant from the New York State Department of Health.



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UPCOMING RCAL EVENTS

May 11-Texas Roadhouse Fundraiser

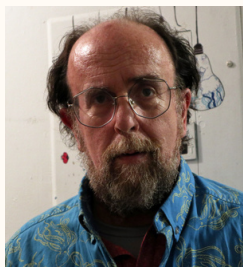
June 4- RCAL & Esopus Community Foundation's Community day

June 14-Open House BBQ

These are only a few of our events taking place for our Year of Celebration, marking our 40th anniversary. Stay Tuned for Further Detail!



NEW RCAL EMPLOYEE



EDWARD MAIETTA
EMPLOYMENT
SPECIALIST

RCAL Welcomes Edward Maietta

Employment Specialist Ed Maietta joined RCAL on April 3rd and is honored to be part of our mission. Ed has walked many paths, including teaching English, speech and science, accounting, environmental stewardship & education, community relations, and career counseling. He plans to bring all of his skill sets to bear as he guides our clients on their explorations in the world of work and careers. Ed is a poet, photographer and problem solver, who says that his greatest skill is recognizing and supporting the growth of others' strengths. "I use this skill whenever I am working alongside my fellow Earth people."



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April is Autism Acceptance Month

Every year, New York State celebrates Autism Acceptance Month throughout the month of April. This year, the United Nations observed World Autism Awareness Day on Sunday, April 2. To view articles and videos of the event, [click here](#).

According to a recent study released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated one in 36 8-year-olds had autism, up from one in 44 in 2018. What's more, findings from the CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network show a need for timely and equitable access to early identification and support services. Read more on the CDC's report and findings on their website [here](#). Read the New York Times article on this topic [here](#).

A multi-institute team, including researchers from OPWDD's very own Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities has published a study that finds that a routine hearing test may help clinicians detect neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism, in newborns. [Learn more about this new development that could lead to a universal screening tool for autism.](#)



Save the Date!
Saturday, June 10, 2023



GET OUTDOORS & GET TOGETHER DAY

Fun Events at State Parks and DEC Lands All Across NYS

More Information is Coming Soon!

Save the date for Get Outdoors & Get Together Day on Saturday, June 10! the Office of People With Developmental Disabilities will again be partnering with NYS DEC and NYS Parks for this fun day at more than 20 locations all across New York State. Locations and more information to be announced soon!



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Latonya Reeves Freedom Act H.R. 2708

The Latonya Reeves Freedom Act is bipartisan and bicameral civil rights legislation that addresses the injustice of people who need Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) being forced into institutions.

The legislation ensures Disability Freedom by:

- clarifying that every individual who is eligible for LTSS has a federally protected right to receive services and supports in the community;
- requiring that states and other LTSS insurance providers deliver services in a manner that allows Disabled individuals to live in the most integrated setting, have maximum control over their services and supports, and lead an independent life;
- articulating the right to live in the community without creating unnecessary government programs, ensuring that states have broad latitude to determine how they will secure this right;
- establishing a comprehensive planning requirement comparable to the process states used to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act which includes addressing disparities in the provision and availability of HCBS; and
- requiring public entities to address the need for affordable, accessible, integrated housing that is independent of service delivery.

The bill is named for Latonya Reeves, who after having been institutionalized as a child, found herself at risk of being sent back into an institution because the state of Tennessee did not provide the services and supports Latonya needed to live in freedom. Deborah Cunningham, the Executive Director of the Memphis Center for Independent Living, helped keep Latonya free by coordinating Latonya's escape to Denver, Colorado and the open arms of the Reverend Wade Blank from the Atlantis Community. Latonya blazed a new trail on what would become the Disability Road to Freedom. In the decades she has lived free in Denver, Latonya has worked to support other people with disabilities transitioning into the community and been an activist with ADAPT. Hear Latonya tell her story in the video ([click here](#)).

The bill was reintroduced in the 118th Congress on April 19th, 2023 on Latonya's birthday, in her memory. Latonya passed away in January of this year.

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CAREER AND SERVICES EXPO

Are you looking for information about career pathways and services in Ulster County?

 MAY 25TH FROM 11:30-3:30
SUNY ULSTER 491 COTTEKILL ROAD STONE RIDGE

Join the Ulster County Transition Council for a day of networking, exploring career pathways, and learning about support services. Connecting youth and their families with information about community and career supports. Workshops on disability topics available from 3:30pm-4:30pm

FOR INFORMATION OR TO SPONSOR
 845-331-0541 x35  www.rcal.org or hnichols@rcal.org





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SPONSOR RCAL'S NEWSLETTER



CONTACT US TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT
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West Park, NY 12493



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