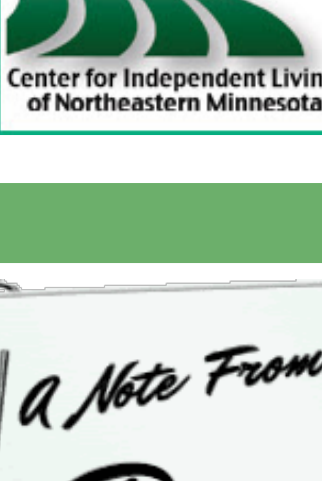


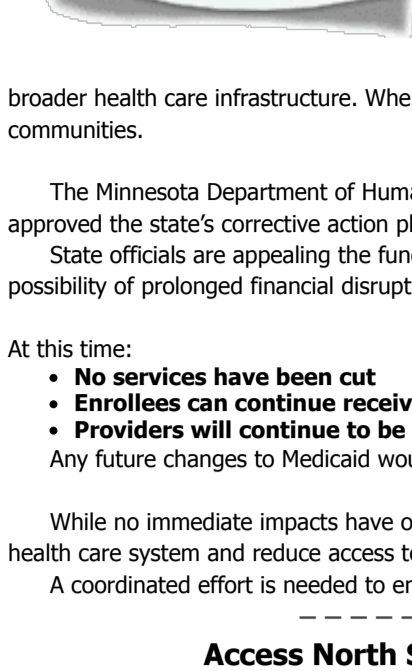
Up North



News

Spring 2026

A Note From Don



Medicaid Funding in Minnesota: What you need to know

Last week, a federal judge ruled that the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)** can continue deferring federal Medicaid funding to Minnesota. This brings the total deferred amount to **\$260 million**, creating immediate uncertainty for the state's budget.

If these deferrals continue, the financial impact could grow significantly—potentially reaching **\$1 billion over the next year**. In addition, there is a separate federal threat to withhold up to **\$2 billion annually**, putting more than **\$3.1 billion in total Medicaid funding at risk** for Minnesota.

Why this matters

Minnesota's Medicaid program—known as Medical Assistance—is a cornerstone of the state's health care system:

- Serves 1 in 5 Minnesotans
- Covers 30% of births statewide
- Provides care for about 40% of children

Because of its reach, Medicaid funding supports not only those enrolled, but also the broader health care infrastructure. When providers are not fully reimbursed, services may be reduced or eliminated—impacting entire communities.

What's happening behind the scenes

The Minnesota Department of Human Services has been actively strengthening program integrity efforts. In fact, CMS recently approved the state's corrective action plan and acknowledged early progress.

State officials are appealing the funding withholdings and working to recover deferred funds. However, they are also preparing for the possibility of prolonged financial disruption.

What this means right now

At this time:

- **No services have been cut**
- **Enrollees can continue receiving care and prescriptions**
- **Providers will continue to be reimbursed**

Any future changes to Medicaid would require action by the state legislature, and updates will be communicated well in advance.

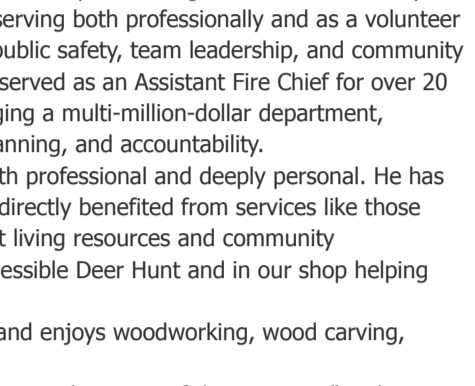
Why awareness is critical

While no immediate impacts have occurred, the scale of potential funding loss is significant. If realized, it could destabilize Minnesota's health care system and reduce access to essential services—especially for people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income families.

A coordinated effort is needed to ensure communities understand what's at stake and to help minimize harm if funding losses occur.

Home Modification Services

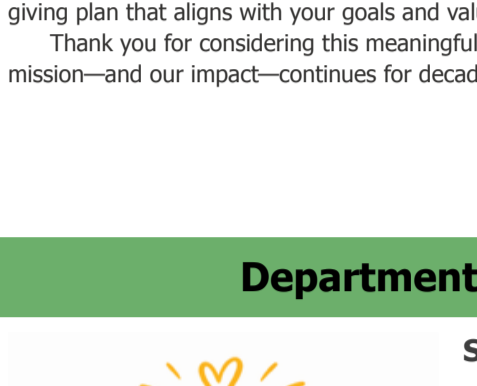
We are deeply grateful to receive funding through the **Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation**. This funding will support the cost & installation of a tub cut for someone in the Grand Rapids area. A tub cut is bath tub modification that involves cutting away the side of a bath tub to allow for easier access into the tub. This modification is usually paired with a shower chair, a few well placed grab bars and a hand help shower nozzle. Tub cuts can be performed on cast iron, steel, fiberglass or plastic tubs. Access North has been a tub cut installer for the past decade. A tub cut conversion can usually be installed for about 10% of the cost of a walk-in shower.



Did You Know...

Access North can work with you to improve the accessibility of your home. Our Certified Aging in Place (CAPS) Specialist can work with you to identify accessibility improvements that can help you safely Age in Place and stay in your home longer. Examples include walk-in, roll-in showers, tub cuts, high toilet installation, widened doorways/hallways, main floor laundry room, grab bars, handrails and more.

If you'd like more information on the home modification services here at Access North, please email at info@accessnorth.com or call 800-390-3681.



Track Chair Donation Received

Access North has received a donation of new track chair from the Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED). The track chair will be a great addition to our annual Accessible Deer Hunt this year on October 23 & 24th in McCarthy Beach State Park. We are currently exploring ways to partner with a local community or park regarding trail access throughout the year.

Welcome to our New Board Member

Please join us in welcoming Steve Cooper to the Access North Board of Directors. (Steve is pictured to the left as a hunt mentor with Corey - one of our hunters - using a track chair during our Accessible Deer hunt!)

Steve brings a lifetime of service and leadership to our organization. After nearly 40 years as a firefighter and first responder—serving both professionally and as a volunteer—he retired with extensive experience in public safety, team leadership, and community commitment. During his career, Steve also served as an Assistant Fire Chief for over 20 years, where he was responsible for managing a multi-million-dollar department, demonstrating strong skills in oversight, planning, and accountability.

Steve's connection to our mission is both professional and deeply personal. He has family members with disabilities who have directly benefited from services like those provided by Access North, giving him meaningful insight into the importance of independent living resources and community support. Steve has been a volunteer at Access North for the past several years with our Accessible Deer Hunt and in our shop helping with ramp construction.

In addition to his professional background, Steve is actively engaged in his community and enjoys woodworking, wood carving, photography, and volunteering.

Steve shares that he hopes to offer "outside insight and guidance to help ensure the continued success of this program," and we are excited to have his perspective and dedication on our board.

Welcome, Steve—we're glad to have you with us!

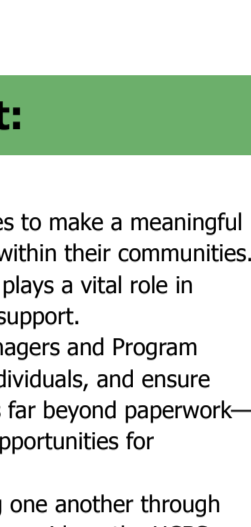
Your Support Truly Makes a Difference

By donating to Access North, you can help us sustain our mission and ensure that individuals throughout our community have the resources they need to age in place with dignity.

If you would like to make a one-time donation or learn more about planned giving options, I would be happy to speak with you personally. Please feel free to contact me at dbrunette@accessnorth.net to arrange a confidential conversation. We are also glad to collaborate with you and your financial advisor to develop a giving plan that aligns with your goals and values.

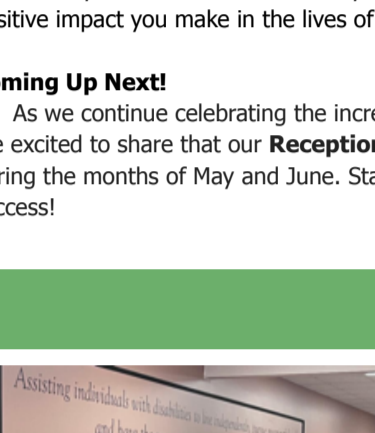
Thank you for considering this meaningful way to support Access North. Together, we can ensure that our mission—and our impact—continues for decades to come.

— Don Brunette, Executive Director



Make a Donation

Department Appreciation HCBS Team Spotlight:



Supporting Independence, Empowering Lives

The Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) team continues to make a meaningful impact by supporting individuals in living independently and thriving within their communities. Through dedication, compassion, and strong collaboration, this team plays a vital role in ensuring that those we serve receive the highest quality of care and support.

At the heart of the HCBS team is a group of committed Case Managers and Program Managers who work diligently to coordinate services, advocate for individuals, and ensure that needs are met in a timely and effective manner. Their work goes far beyond paperwork—they build relationships, problem-solve daily challenges, and create opportunities for individuals to live fuller, more independent lives.

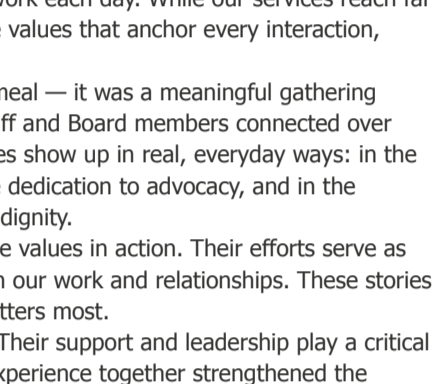
What truly sets this team apart is their commitment to communication and teamwork. Whether it's supporting one another through complex situations, stepping in to assist when needed, or maintaining open lines of communication with staff and providers, the HCBS team consistently demonstrates a "we're in this together" mindset.

In recent months, the team has continued to grow and evolve, welcoming new members who have quickly embraced the values and expectations of the program. These individuals bring fresh perspectives, enthusiasm, and a strong willingness to learn—further strengthening the team as a whole.

In recent months, the team has continued to grow and evolve, welcoming new members who have quickly embraced the values and expectations of the program. These individuals bring fresh perspectives, enthusiasm, and a strong willingness to learn—further strengthening the team as a whole.

The HCBS team exemplifies professionalism, compassion, and accountability. Their dedication does not go unnoticed, and their work makes a lasting difference every single day.

Thank you to the HCBS team for your continued hard work, commitment, and the positive impact you make in the lives of those you serve. You are truly appreciated!

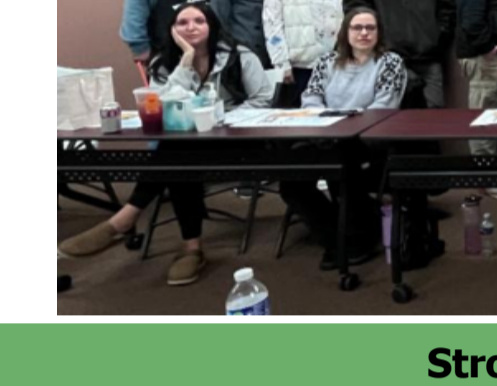


Coming Up Next!

As we continue celebrating the incredible people who make our organization strong, we are excited to share that our **Receptionists, Administrative Assistants, and Executive Director** will be highlighted and appreciated during the months of May and June. Stay tuned as we recognize the important contributions they make to our daily operations and overall success!

— Jenny Holland, Talent Acquisition Specialist

Celebrating our Core Values!



A Luncheon of Connection, Recognition and Purpose

There are moments throughout the year that remind us not just of what we do—but why we do it. Our recent Core Values Luncheon on March 18, shared with Staff and members of our Board of Directors, was one of those moments.

Bringing everyone together in one space created an opportunity to pause, reflect, and celebrate the principles that guide our work each day. While our services reach far beyond the walls of our Center, it is our core values that anchor every interaction, decision, and success story.

The luncheon was more than a shared meal—it was a meaningful gathering centered on appreciation and alignment. Staff and Board members connected over conversations that highlighted how our values show up in real, everyday ways: in the compassion shown to those we serve, in the dedication to advocacy, and in the commitment to fostering independence and dignity.

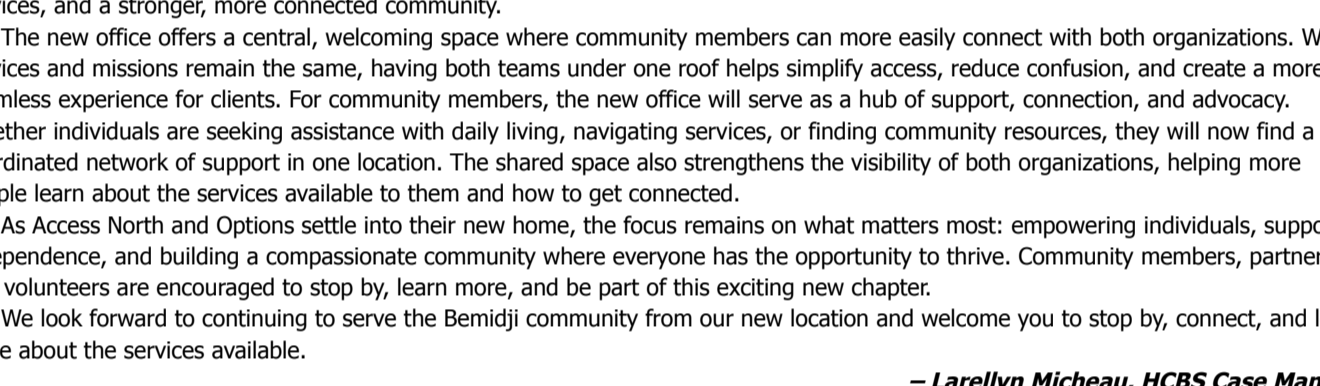
Throughout the event, we took time to recognize individuals and teams who exemplify these values in action. Their efforts serve as powerful reminders that our mission is not just a statement—it is something we live out through our work and relationships. These stories of impact brought our values to life, reinforcing the importance of staying grounded in what matters most.

The presence of our Board of Directors added another meaningful layer to the celebration. Their support and leadership play a critical role in ensuring that our values remain at the forefront of our strategic direction. Sharing this experience together strengthened the connection between governance and day-to-day operations, highlighting our shared commitment to the people and communities we serve.

Events like this luncheon are important because they create space for recognition, reflection, and renewed motivation. They remind us that while our work can be complex and demanding, it is also deeply rewarding and rooted in purpose.

As we move forward, the energy and inspiration from this gathering will continue to guide us. Our core values are not just words—they are the foundation of who we are as an organization. Celebrating them together reinforces our unity and strengthens our ability to make a meaningful difference.

Together, we remain committed to living these values every day.



Stronger Together in Bemidji

Congratulations to Options CIL for the Purchase of Their New Office and Thank You for Allowing Us to Share Space in this New Location

Access North and Options CIL are excited to announce their move to a new shared office space at 1002 Washington Ave South in Bemidji, Minnesota. While the location may be new, the partnership between these two nonprofits is not. For years, both organizations have worked closely together to support individuals and families across northern Minnesota—and this move simply reflects that ongoing collaboration in a shared space.

Options and Access North each bring valuable services and deep community commitment to the people they serve. Their collaboration has long helped individuals access resources, maintain independence, and navigate support systems with confidence. Now, by sharing a new physical location, that connection becomes even more visible and convenient for the community. Both organizations have long been committed to supporting individuals and families across northern Minnesota, each bringing unique strengths and services that make a meaningful difference in people's lives. This move represents more than just a change of address—it's a step toward improved access to services, and a stronger, more connected community.

The new office offers a central, welcoming space where community members can more easily connect with both organizations. While services and missions remain the same, having both teams under one roof helps simplify access, reduce confusion, and create a more seamless experience for clients. For community members, the new office will serve as a hub of support, connection, and advocacy.

Whether individuals are seeking assistance with daily living, navigating services, or finding community resources, they will now find a coordinated network of support in one location. The shared space also strengthens the visibility of both organizations, helping more people learn about the services available to them and how to get connected.

As Access North and Options settle into their new home, the focus remains on what matters most: empowering individuals, supporting independence, and building a compassionate community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Community members, partners, and volunteers are encouraged to stop by, learn more, and be part of this exciting new chapter.

We look forward to continuing to serve the Bemidji community from our new location and welcome you to stop by, connect, and learn more about the services available.



— Larellyn Micheau, HCBS Case Manager

HR Team Attends Iron Range Job Fair



Building Connections with Local Workers

The HR Team proudly represented the organization at the Iron Range Job Fair on April 23 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The event was very well attended, providing a great opportunity to connect with members of the community and share information about current and future career opportunities. Throughout the day, the team welcomed a steady flow of individuals who stopped by to ask thoughtful questions, learn more about our organization, and submit resumes.

It was an energizing and productive event, and the HR team looks forward to continuing to build connections with talented candidates in the community.

— Kim Lindquist, Human Resource Coordinator and Jenny Holland, Talent Acquisition Specialist

IL Team attends Transition Events

Transition Summit 2026: College, Community and Career Fair

In March, members of Access North's Independent Living team participated in another year of aiding youth with disabilities prepare for transition out of high school during the Transition Summit held at the High School of Lac College.

Fundamental students with disabilities from 14 Minnesota school districts came to learn and gather resources for college, careers, and independent living skills. Last year, our IL team presented valuable information on Workplace Readiness Skills. This year, we decided to bring back our interactive presentation called Fast Track to Driver's Ed - The Road to Independence: Focusing on individualized support, adaptive learning materials such as the Easy Read MN Driver's manual, adaptive driving equipment, and various accommodations to overcome barriers.



We wanted students to know they are not alone, and that Access North offers a variety of individualized supports, tools, and resources to assist them in becoming a licensed driver despite having a disability. For many students, learning that supports and adaptive options exist can make the goal of driving, and the independence that comes with it, feel possible.

Access North also tabled as an exhibitor for the portion of the College, Community, and Career Fair, providing information, resources, and answering questions on all of our services totaling close to 90 students and teachers that stopped by to learn more about our Center for Independent Living.

— Amber Pittman, Independent Living Coordinator

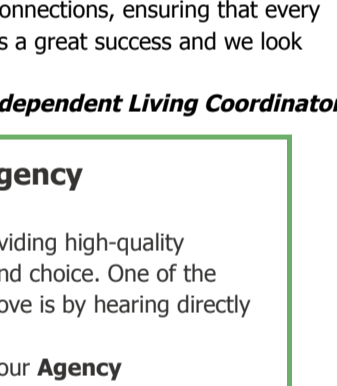
Empowering the Next Step: Students Shine at Transition Expo

On April 21, our Independent Living team participated at the Transition Expo in Virginia. This event was dedicated to supporting students with disabilities as they prepare for life after high school. The expo brought together a wide range of community resources, all focused on helping students, families, and educational staff navigate the transition to adulthood with confidence.

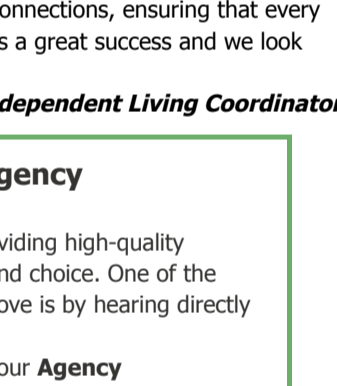
We had the opportunity to connect with a total of 80 attendees by sharing information and answering questions about available supports and services we offer at Access North. It was encouraging to see so many students, families, and staff members actively planning for the future and exploring opportunities for continued learning, employment, and independent living.

Events like the Transition Expo play a vital role in building awareness and strengthening community connections, ensuring that every student has access to the tools and resources they need for a successful transition. Overall, the event was a great success and we look forward to continuing serving our community at future events.

— Alyssa Beaty, Independent Living Coordinator



— Alyssa Beaty, Independent Living Coordinator



— Alyssa Beaty, Independent Living Coordinator

Agency Satisfaction SURVEY

This survey is an opportunity to share your experiences, provide feedback, and let us know what we are doing well — and where we can do better. Whether you are a participant, family member, or partner, your input helps guide our decisions and ensures we are meeting the needs of our community.

Your responses will be used to strengthen our programs, improve services, and shape future planning. Even a few minutes of your time can make a meaningful difference.

Agency Satisfaction Survey

Your Voice Matters: Take Our Agency Satisfaction Survey

At Access North, we are committed to providing high-quality services that support independence, dignity, and choice. One of the most important ways we can continue to improve is by hearing directly from the people we serve.

That's why we invite you to participate in our **Agency Satisfaction Survey**.

Stories of Independence

Building Skills for Independence and Employment

Many people are not always aware of the range of services available to support both independent living and employment goals. Through programs like Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and county waiver services, individuals can access support that focuses on building real, everyday skills.

Waiver services are not just for ongoing care. In some cases, they can be used for short term, targeted supports that focus on building independence. This might include completing an Independent Living Skills assessment, working on specific goals like budgeting, organization, communication, or building routines, or developing skills that support success at home and in the community.

These services can also support employment related goals. This may include building job readiness skills, improving communication, learning how to navigate transportation, or gaining confidence in community and work settings.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services go beyond just helping someone find a job. VR can support individuals in building the skills needed to prepare for and maintain employment. This may include job exploration, work readiness skills, communication and self advocacy, and services like Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students.

Many of these services also overlap with independent living skills, helping individuals build confidence and skills that support both daily life and success in the workplace.

Another important piece of this process is benefits planning. Many people have concerns about how working may impact their Social Security or Medical Assistance. Benefits planning helps answer those questions so individuals can make informed decisions and feel more confident pursuing employment.

At Access North, we can help connect individuals to these services and provide direct support in building the skills needed to live and work more independently.

A Fresh Season for Independence

Spring always seems to bring a sense of starting over. The weather shifts, routines change, and it can feel like a good time to reset a bit after a long winter.

Independent living is not about doing everything on your own. It is about having the choice, control, and support to live the life you want. Striving toward that can look different for everyone, and it often happens through small, steady steps.

Sometimes it is getting back into a routine, trying something new, or reaching out for support in an area that has felt stuck. For some, it might be getting into the community a little more. For others, it could be building skills at home, exploring new tools or technology, or setting a goal that feels manageable.

Whether you are at, spring can be a good reminder that progress does not have to be perfect. It just has to be yours.

Our team is here to support you along the way, whether that means working through goals, connecting you to resources, or helping you find new ways to make daily life easier and more independent.

— Kiri Basore, Co-Lead Independent Living Coordinator

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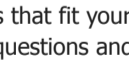
Winston Court - Hibbing, Minnesota (Immediately Available/Pictured)

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Short Waiting Lists on Other Residences

1. Superior View - Duluth, Minnesota

2. Pine Grove - Duluth, Minnesota

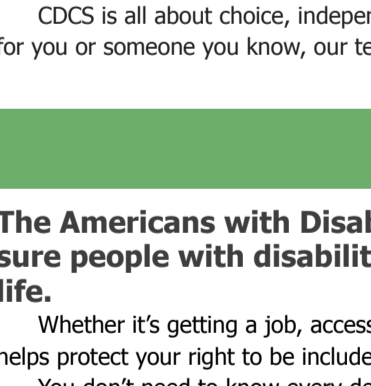
3. Redruth Valley - Duluth, Minnesota

4. Burke Apartments - Duluth, Minnesota

5. Northern Lights Apartments - Duluth, Minnesota

6. Moses Residence - Grand Rapids, Minnesota

CDCS Support Planning at Access North



Did you know that Access North has a team of Certified Support Planners ready to help you navigate your services?

Consumer Directed Community Supports (CDCS) is a flexible service option through Minnesota's waivers that allows individuals to have more choice and control over their care. Instead of traditional services, CDCS lets you decide how your budget is used to meet your needs. This can include hiring your own staff, purchasing goods or services, and creating a plan that works best for your daily life.

Our Support Planning team is here to guide you through the process. We work alongside you to develop your CDCS plan, make updates when your needs change, and help ensure everything stays on track. We also coordinate with your case manager and Financial Management Service provider to keep things running smoothly.

So how does someone take this path? It typically starts with your case manager. If you are on a waiver and interested in more flexibility and control over your services, you can ask about CDCS as an option. From there, you can choose a Certified Support Planner, like one of our team members at Access North, to help you qualify and maintain your plan.

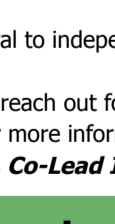
If you are not currently on a waiver but think you may build, our team can help connect you with the right place to start, including getting set up for an assessment and eligibility.

CDCS is all about choice, independence, and creating supports that fit your life. If you are curious whether CDCS could be a good fit for you or someone you know, our team is happy to help answer questions and get you started.

— Kiri Basore, Co-Lead Independent Living Coordinator

What the ADA Means for You

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is all about making sure people with disabilities can participate fully in everyday life.



Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Whether it's getting a job, accessing services, or going out in the community, the ADA helps protect your right to be included.

You don't need to know every detail of the law, but understanding the basics can help you advocate for yourself.

Title I - Employment

If you're working or looking for a job, the ADA says employers can't discriminate against you because of a disability. It also means you can ask for reasonable accommodations, like flexible scheduling, assistive technology, or changes to your workspace to help you do your job.

Title II - State & Local Services

This applies to things like public transportation, schools, and government programs. These services must be accessible to you. If something isn't accessible like a building, program, or service, you have the right to ask for changes.

Title III - Businesses & Community Spaces

Places like stores, restaurants, clinics, and hotels must be accessible. That includes physical access (like ramps and accessible restrooms) and, increasingly, digital access (like websites that work with screen readers).

Title IV - Communication Access

If you have a hearing or speech disability, this section ensures access to services like relay systems so you can communicate over the phone and other technologies.

Title V - Your Rights

This section includes important protections, like making sure you can't be punished or treated unfairly for standing up for your rights under the ADA.

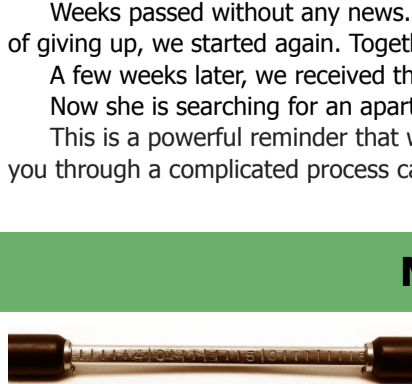
Why this matters for Independent Living

At its core, the ADA upholds access to independence, choice, and equal access. Values that are central to independent living. Knowing your rights can help you speak up, ask for what you need, and remove barriers in your daily life.

If you're ever unsure whether something should be accessible, it's okay to ask questions or reach out for support. You don't have to navigate it alone. Feel free to reach out to the Independent Living Team at Access North for more information and resources.

— Jake Knaffla, Co-Lead Independent Living Coordinator

Smartphones as Assistive Technology

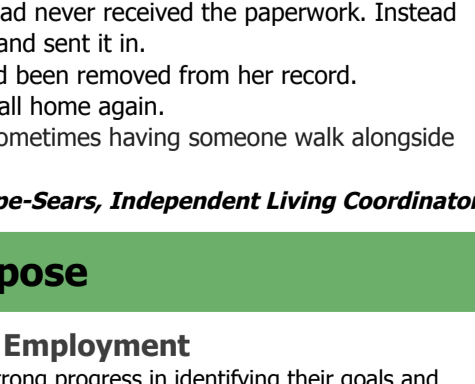


Accessibility in Your Pocket!

Smartphones have quietly become one of the most powerful accessibility tools available today, reducing the need for specialized devices and putting independence directly into people's hands. Built-in features like iOS Accessibility and Android Accessibility Suite offer a wide range of customizable features that support users with visual, hearing, mobility, and cognitive disabilities. Screen readers, magnification, voice control, real-time captions, and simplified interfaces allow individuals to tailor their devices to fit their specific needs, rather than adapting themselves to rigid technology.

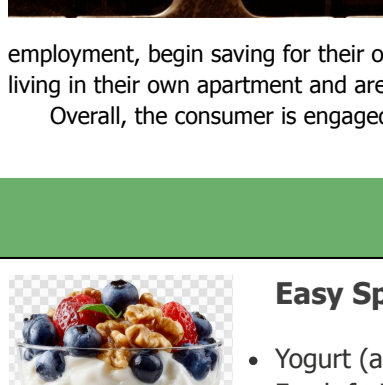
What makes smartphones especially impactful is how seamlessly accessibility fits into everyday life. These tools support common activities like communicating with others, navigating the community, managing schedules, and accessing essential services such as banking or telehealth. Instead of relying on multiple assistive devices, people can consolidate many functions into a single, familiar device making independence more achievable and less stigmatized.

While the progress is significant, barriers still exist. Many people are unaware of these features or may find them difficult to set up without support, and not all apps or digital services are fully accessible. Access North is currently offering a "Bring Your Own Device" computer/technology class to help people gain the skills and confidence needed to fully utilize the capabilities of tools they already have. Reach out to the Independent Living team at 218-262-6675 to learn more!



— Jon Rix, Independent Living Coordinator

Evicted, Disabled and Frustrated; Then Determined



Persistence Pays Off!

Almost three years ago, one of our consumers was evicted. What followed was a long and difficult search for stable housing.

During that time, she stayed wherever she could. Sometimes friends offered a couch. Other times she had no choice but to stay in shelters or on the streets. She shared how frightening and exhausting that experience was, especially as a woman navigating homelessness.

Accessibility made the situation even harder. The largest homeless shelter in her area has no elevators. For people with physical disabilities, that means the shelter simply isn't usable. When the only available shelter isn't accessible, finding a safe place to stay becomes even more challenging.

One of the biggest barriers to moving forward was the eviction on her record. The process to overturn an eviction requires extensive paperwork and can be intimidating to complete alone. The stress of trying to navigate the process by herself caused a great deal of anxiety, so she reached out to Access North for help.

We met in person twice and worked through the paperwork step by step. Breaking the process into smaller sections helped make it more manageable. After completing everything, we sent the paperwork to the county and waited for a response.

Weeks passed without any news. When we followed up, the county told us they had never received the paperwork. Instead of giving up, we started again. Together we completed the paperwork a second time and sent it in.

A few weeks later, we received the news we had been hoping for: the eviction had been removed from her record.

Now she is searching for an apartment and looking forward to having a place to call home again.

This is a powerful reminder that with the right support, persistence can pay off. Sometimes having someone walk alongside you through a complicated process can make all the difference.

— Brittany Pope-Sears, Independent Living Coordinator

Moving Forward with a Purpose

Making Steady Progress towards Employment

The consumer I