



January 3, 2011

Jill Rogers
Delaware Division of Public Health
Thomas Collins Building, Suite 7
540 South Dupont Highway
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Ms. Rogers:

The creation of the Governor's Council on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention is an exciting opportunity to improve the health of all Delawareans in a meaningful, sustainable way. The charge of the council is very much aligned with the work that we have been doing at the Center for Disabilities Studies at the University of Delaware since 2007. We look forward to providing resources, technical assistance and support for the Council as it moves forward. We plan to attend the Council meetings to follow its work and be available as a resource.

As the Council begins to assess the burden of disease in Delaware and to develop strategies to address health disparities, there are three key points we would like to bring to the Council's attention.

1. Individuals with disabilities represent 20.0 percent of the Delaware population (Delaware BRFSS, 2009).
2. Individuals reporting disabilities disproportionately carry the burden of disease and preventable chronic conditions (see examples below).
3. Health promotion strategies developed by the Council must be inclusive and accessible for individuals with a wide-range of abilities. The integration of people with disabilities into broad system-level change is essential to eliminate the disparities in health status experienced by people with disabilities.

It is imperative that the Council commit to integration of people with disabilities in all health promotion and disease prevention initiatives. The Center for Disabilities Studies has been working on disability and health issues since we received funding in 2007 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/index.html>). The Healthy Delawareans

with Disabilities (HDWD) Project identifies issues, develops strategies and facilitates community collaborations to level the playing field in health care for individuals with all kinds of disabilities. We welcome the chance to share model integration and inclusion policies adopted by other states.

People with disabilities represent twenty percent of the population in Delaware and are at high risk for many chronic diseases and secondary conditions, as well as for obesity. According to the 2009 Delaware Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data, the prevalence rate for obesity in Delaware is 27.6%. For individuals with disabilities in Delaware, that rate rises to 42.2%. Disparities like this are also seen in the data for other conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and also lifestyle risk factors.

Variable	Without a disability	With a disability
Body mass index: Obese	25.8%	42.2%
Ever told by doctor have diabetes	5.3%	15.5%
Ever diagnosed with a heart attack	3.0%	10.3%
Ever told have high blood pressure	27.4%	44.4%
Meet physical activity recommendations	52.9%	42.5%
Has the recommended 5+ daily servings of fruits or vegetables	24.4%	27.4%
Smoking status: current smoker	17.1%	23.3%

These disparities, and others, are described in the report, *Disability and Health in Delaware, Delaware Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2006-2008 Selected Data*, available on the Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities website at <http://www.gohdwd.org/documents/DisabilityandHealthinDelaware.pdf>.

Delawareans with disabilities face many challenges in trying to achieve and maintain good health – physical barriers, communication barriers and lack of cultural competence. The HDWD Advisory Council and staff have developed a plan that outlines the work that needs to be done in Delaware to improve health for all. You can read this plan, *A Strategic Plan for Delaware to Promote Health and Prevent Secondary Health Conditions in Individuals with Disabilities*, online at http://www.gohdwd.org/documents/hdwd_plan_for_action.pdf. We hope that some of

the goals and objectives of this plan might be adopted by the Council, or at least inform the Council's deliberations.

Please consider Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities a resource for information on health and disability as you begin to coordinate the work of the Council. We are happy to help bring research, model inclusive programs, and resources to the Council's attention as the need arises. If there is anything that we can do to assist in moving this forward, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Ilka K. Riddle, Ph.D
Director
Health and Wellness Unit

Eileen Sparling, Ed.M.
Project Coordinator
Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities