



Disability Health Action Network

2025 – 2026

End-of-Year Summary

DHAN Action Plan Goals

As a statewide collaborative (including disability advocates, physical/oral/behavioral healthcare representatives, governmental agencies, insurance reps, researchers, and others), the Disability Health Action Network establishes the following goals for 2025-2026.



Resource Hub:

By August 31, 2025, launch a Disability Health Resource Hub with links to existing resources for professionals, families and individuals, and Institutions of Higher Education.

Access:

By June 30, 2026, create a current resource about telehealth information that ensures people with disabilities and their families have access to information on telehealth services, accommodations, and policy allowances.

Qualified Healthcare Personnel:

By June 30, 2026, curate existing curricula to be introduced for use in universities, hospital networks, and other educational settings. Create a communication strategy introducing the healthcare community to the disability community and why health equity matters.

Voices & Policy:

By June 30, 2026, advance the reactivation of Governor's Cabinet and Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities to increase involvement of people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers in policy making and healthcare decisions and development of systems at the beginning of their process.

Data and Research:

By June 30, 2026, identify data sources that currently exist within the healthcare system as relates to individuals with disabilities in Pennsylvania.

Advancing Disability Health Equity Through Collaboration, Research, Advocacy, and Systems Change

The year 2025-2026 marked a period of significant growth, collaboration, and impact for the Disability Health Action Network (DHAN). Convened by The Arc of Pennsylvania, DHAN continued to bring together disability advocates, self-advocates, healthcare providers, health systems, researchers, policymakers, insurers, educators, and community organizations around a shared commitment to advancing disability health equity throughout Pennsylvania. Through an Advisory Committee and specialized Work Groups, DHAN worked toward improving healthcare access, strengthening disability representation in decision-making, expanding the disability-competent workforce, enhancing disability health data, and developing sustainable resources for individuals with disabilities, families, and professionals.

Throughout the year DHAN served as a statewide convener where stakeholders worked collectively to identify barriers, share expertise, elevate disability voices, and pursue solutions that improve health outcomes for Pennsylvanians with disabilities. Discussions repeatedly emphasized a core belief of the network: people with disabilities must be involved in shaping healthcare systems, policies, programs, and research that affect their lives

Building Infrastructure for Disability Health Information

One of DHAN's most visible accomplishments during 2025-2026 was the successful development and launch of the Disability Health Resource Hub. Originally envisioned as a repository of health-related resources for individuals with disabilities, families, healthcare professionals, and institutions of higher education, the project evolved into a comprehensive statewide information platform designed to improve navigation and access to disability health resources.

Development of the Resource Hub involved months of collaboration, resource identification, accessibility review, website testing, stakeholder feedback, and ongoing refinement. Advisory Committee members provided extensive input regarding navigation, accessibility considerations, multilingual access, provider directories, disclaimers, resource categorization, and future search capabilities. Throughout the process, the Work Group repeatedly emphasized that the Resource Hub should complement, not compete with, existing statewide systems while remaining responsive to evolving community needs.

The website launched as dhanpa.org and serves as a public-facing platform connecting users to resources related to self-advocacy, family supports, healthcare access, professional training, disability data, research, and educational opportunities. During development, stakeholders consistently described the Resource Hub as a "living and breathing" resource that will continue to evolve as new information, partnerships, and resources emerge. The Advisory Committee also established processes for ongoing updates, resource submissions, and user feedback to ensure the platform remains current and relevant.

Improving Access to Healthcare

DHAN's Access Work Group focused on improving access to healthcare information and services for people with disabilities, particularly in the area of telehealth. As healthcare delivery models continued to evolve following the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to ongoing policy changes, the group sought to identify and organize information that would help individuals with disabilities and their families navigate telehealth services and accommodations.

The group ultimately compiled twenty-six existing telehealth resources rather than creating duplicative materials, emphasizing the importance of leveraging existing expertise and information. During discussions, Work Group members recognized that telehealth guidance would need to remain adaptable due to rapidly changing federal policies, reimbursement structures, and healthcare delivery systems. Rather than producing static materials that could quickly become outdated, the group prioritized the development of a dynamic resource approach capable of evolving alongside future policy changes.

Discussions also broadened beyond telehealth to address larger questions of healthcare accessibility, provider discrimination, healthcare ableism, and barriers experienced by people with disabilities when seeking healthcare services. These conversations increasingly focused on provider attitudes, disability competency, and healthcare system design as important drivers of health outcomes.

Developing a More Qualified Healthcare Workforce

The Qualified Healthcare Staff Work Group spent the year examining how healthcare professionals are trained and how disability health competency can be strengthened throughout the healthcare system. The group intentionally adopted a broad definition of healthcare personnel, recognizing that health experiences are influenced by many individuals and systems beyond physicians and nurses. Discussions included direct care providers, administrative staff, insurance personnel, support professionals, and others who interact with people with disabilities across healthcare settings.

The Work Group curated disability-related educational resources and professional development opportunities for inclusion in the DHAN Resource Hub. Members also worked to identify gaps in disability training and explored methods for increasing participation in existing educational opportunities. Particular attention was given to ensuring that resources could eventually be categorized by audience and educational need, making them easier for healthcare professionals to find and use.

A major accomplishment of the year was the development of a disability health communication toolkit designed to help introduce healthcare professionals to disability health equity concepts and increase awareness of available training resources. The Work Group also began engaging medical students and emerging healthcare professionals as ambassadors and early adopters of disability-inclusive healthcare practices. These efforts reflect a long-term commitment to transforming healthcare culture through education, awareness, and professional development.

Discussions throughout the year reinforced a growing consensus that disability education should not be delivered through isolated trainings but rather embedded throughout healthcare education and workforce development systems. Advisory Committee members explored opportunities to work with universities, health systems, state agencies, and national initiatives to strengthen disability-inclusive curricula and continuing education opportunities.

Promoting Disability Representation in Government

The Voices and Policy Work Group achieved one of DHAN's most significant accomplishments of the year through its efforts to increase disability representation within state government.

Building upon years of advocacy and historical research, the Work Group examined Pennsylvania's former Governor's Cabinet and Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities and explored opportunities for reactivation. Members researched past executive orders, reviewed legislative history, developed educational materials, drafted letters, and organized stakeholder engagement efforts in support of increased disability representation in policymaking.

Throughout 2025-2026, DHAN repeatedly emphasized that people with disabilities should not only participate in disability-specific discussions but should be present in all policy conversations that affect their lives. This principle guided discussions with the Governor's Office and informed ongoing advocacy efforts. By the spring of 2026, these efforts contributed to broader statewide advocacy that culminated in Governor Shapiro signing Executive Order 2026-02, establishing the Governor's Advisory Commission on People with Disabilities. DHAN Advisory Committee members viewed this achievement as a major milestone in advancing disability-inclusive governance within Pennsylvania.

The Work Group's activities throughout the year reflected a larger commitment to ensuring that disability voices are incorporated into policymaking from the beginning of decision-making processes, rather than after policies and systems have already been developed.

Advancing Disability Health Data

The Data and Research Work Group made substantial progress in advancing disability health data and research across Pennsylvania. Members identified multiple existing healthcare data sources related to disability and established new partnerships with organizations involved in disability health research and health equity initiatives. The group also began supporting efforts to improve disability data collection within the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

A central component of the year's work was Temple University's statewide assessment of disability representation in Community Health Needs Assessments and Community Health Assessments conducted across Pennsylvania. This project examined how disability is represented within community health planning processes and whether people with disabilities are meaningfully included in assessment activities, stakeholder engagement, and resulting improvement plans.

The assessment revealed important gaps:

- One-third of assessments did not include disability demographic information.

- More than half did not identify people with disabilities as a population experiencing health disparities.
- Disability representation often focused primarily on older adults and children rather than working-age adults.
- Most organizations conducted no targeted outreach to disability communities.
- Many organizations relied solely on secondary data sources rather than collecting information directly from people with disabilities.

The project also identified promising practices among organizations that demonstrated stronger disability inclusion and generated recommendations for improving disability representation in future assessments, planning processes, and community engagement efforts. These findings are expected to inform future advocacy, research, and systems-level change efforts statewide.

Conclusion

DHAN strengthened a growing network of leaders committed to ensuring that disability voices are included wherever healthcare decisions are made. As the network moves into 2026-2027, it is positioned not only to continue implementing its Action Plan, but also to shape emerging conversations around technology, healthcare delivery, data, and public policy in ways that promote a more equitable, accessible, and inclusive healthcare system for all Pennsylvanians with disabilities.

Member Organizations:

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Disability Rights Pennsylvania

Geisinger Health

Good Measures

Temple University, Institute on Disabilities, University Center of Excellence
on Developmental Disabilities

National Institute of Rural and Minority Health (NIRMH)

Office of the Governor

PA Coalition for Oral Health

PA Department of Human Services/Office of Developmental Programs

Penn Dental

Pennsylvania Centers for Independent Living (PCIL) *

Pennsylvania Department of Health

Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC)

Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA)

Social Impact, LLC

Special Olympics Pennsylvania *

SPIN, Inc.

The Arc of Philadelphia

The Arc of Pennsylvania *

The Arc of Susquehanna *

The Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania

The National Task Group on Intellectual Disabilities and Dementia Practices

UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh *

William Penn Human Services

Woods Services, Inc.

(* Indicates that representation included individuals with disabilities)



Disability Health Action Network is an initiative by The Arc of Pennsylvania.