

NDSC Statement on ACL

The National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) is deeply troubled by the recent [announcement](#) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to eliminate thousands of HHS staff and reorganize the Administration for Community Living (ACL) by splitting its functions across other agencies.

The ACL was formed in 2012 as a hub for people with disabilities and older adults to coordinate community living across HHS and with other federal agencies and is based upon the [fundamental principle](#) that “older adults and people of all ages with disabilities should be able to live where they choose, with the people they choose, and with the ability to participate fully in their communities.” ACL’s effectiveness has been [well-documented](#) by years of data showing a decrease in institutionalization and increase in access to community-living resources and services for older adults and adults with disabilities. It oversees many different [programs](#) for people with disabilities in areas such as independent living, employment, advocacy and empowerment, emergency response services, health care, and more.

A small sampling of the programs for people with disabilities that ACL has cultivated and manages that are now at-risk include:

- Independent living – ACL awards and manages thousands of grants and contracts to help people of all ages live independently in their communities, including those administered by the Centers for Independent Living (CILS), which are nonprofit, community-based, non-residential organizations that are controlled and operated by and for people with disabilities that provide an array of services to keep people with disabilities living in the community.
- Civil rights protections- ACL oversees Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems in every state, which inform people of their rights, investigate suspected abuse and neglect, and provide free legal representation and support to people with disabilities. Each state has a designated P&A agency, often known as Disability Rights Centers. To find and connect with your state’s P&A organization, click [here](#).
- Data collection – ACL initiatives and runs data collection projects on national trends in services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities relating to community living, in-home supports, health, employment, and more.

- State Councils on Developmental Disabilities – ACL funds and oversees the DD Councils in every state, which create programs to improve the daily lives of people with I/DD.
- University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (UCEDDs)- ACL coordinates and oversees UCEDDs, which are centers attached to universities that advise federal, state, and community policymakers to promote opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities to exercise self-determination and to be independent, productive, integrated, and included in all facets of community life.
- Employment – ACL awards grants to communities to promote competitive, integrated employment and “Employment First” programs, and has developed federal partnerships with agencies such as the Department of Education to break down silos between independent living, vocational rehabilitation, and special education programs
- Caregivers and Respite – ACL coordinates programs such as the National Family Caregiver Support Program and the Lifespan Respite Care Program for caregivers of people with disabilities and older adults.

NDSC’s deep concerns about the dismantling of ACL are exacerbated by the recent actions taken by the Administration to gut the U.S. Department of Education and its proposal to move the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to HHS. Although NDSC opposes this move, ACL would have been a logical place for OSEP to reside in HHS if it is moved by Congress, because of ACL’s subject matter expertise in disability-related issues. However, the workforce reduction of at least 20,000 HHS employees and scattering of ACL programs across other agencies would make it even more difficult for HHS to oversee special education and the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

NDSC is similarly concerned that the proposed cuts to Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Social Security Administration by some Members of Congress and the Administration would worsen the negative impact of dissolving ACL because people with disabilities will have access to fewer resources to live and thrive in their communities. Cuts to any or all of these vital programs for people with disabilities are devastating and will set back by decades our progress towards inclusion in education, employment, and community living.

NDSC encourages you to make several calls to try to restore ACL and its important programs:

- (1) Call your Members of Congress – you can call the Capitol Switchboard at 1-202-224-3121 and ask to be connected to your Representative and Senators (you can find out who represents you [here](#)).
- (2) Call the Department of Health and Human Services at 1-877-696-6775.
- (3) Call the White House at 1-202-456-1414.

Here is a script you can use: My name is XXXX, and I live in (city, state). I am calling to ask you to restore the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in HHS, along with all of its programs for people with disabilities and older adults. ACL is a vital hub in the federal government for disability-related resources and services, and its dismantling will significantly diminish opportunities for people with disabilities to live and work in their local communities. Please support people with disabilities and their families by supporting the Administration for Community Living. Thank you!