

Video transcript

Inclusive Healthy Communities

Peri Nearon

Executive Director

New Jersey Division of Disability Services

The Inclusive Healthy Communities program, or IHC, is a state-funded initiative launched in 2021 by the New Jersey Department of Human Services, Division of Disability Services, to improve the health of people with disabilities throughout New Jersey by creating healthy inclusive communities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people with disabilities are at disproportionately higher risk for preventable chronic diseases. In New Jersey we have nearly 8.9 million people, and one in four have a disability. So this kind of an effort has the potential to benefit a significant proportion of our New Jersey residents.

Bonnielin Swenor

Director

Johns Hopkins University Disability Health Research Center

What excites me about this program is it is a road map to the future of disability inclusion. You know, to me it is an ecosystem change approach, which is exactly what we need in this space.

Kaleena Berryman

Director

Abbott Leadership Institute

Inclusion is a social justice issue because young people with disability have the same right as any other student. Especially for me as a mom of a disabled child, I see how the world treats him. I've seen how the world has left him out.

Bonnielin Swenor

I began my journey, my personal journey with disability in 2005 when I suddenly began to lose my vision due to a degenerative retinal disease. There's so many barriers and challenges for people with disabilities still 30 plus years after the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA is an important law and has gotten us so far, but the disability community knows it's the basement not the ceiling. It is not going to get us — us the disability community — to where we need to be.

Carleton Montgomery

Executive Director

Pinelands Preservation Alliance

The Inclusive Healthy Communities program for us has been a tremendous catalyst. It's something that some of us had been thinking about as an area that we ought to be working on, but what really made it happen was this program coming into existence providing the funding for capacity building and also the encouragement, the information, the fact that we are part of a network of public and private agencies that are coming at the issues of making society accessible and successful for people with various disabilities in different ways.

Peri Nearon

We've taken a very broad approach. We are looking to fund non-profits, municipalities, communities. We have two different kinds of grants: The capacity grant is for an organization that is beginning at a foundational level. So they need to go out, and they need to build relationships. They need to engage people with lived experience. And then the other grant is an implementation grant, and those folks are further along in the process. They have the partnerships. They have the participation of people with lived experience. They're ready to go out and actually make a change in their community.

Tara Roberts

Community Relations & New Business Initiatives Supervisor

JESPY House

Inclusion for our clients means understanding, being accepted, having a seat at the table. And just because they're a part of the JESPY community doesn't mean that they don't want to gain esteem and self-confidence by being a part of the larger community.

Ivette Guillermo-McGahee

Founder and Executive Director

Allies in Caring

We're changing the culture. We are moving away from looking at the deficiencies of the people. Instead of that, we want to look at what are the assets, what are the talents, what are the resources that exist in the community that we can elevate and use, because most people just want to be able to contribute and participate and belong. And when you give them an opportunity to belong and offer their gifts that really helps in in many aspects.

Peri Nearon

Including people with disabilities in every phase of planning and implementation is a foundational concept for the IHC grant program. So that is a non-negotiable for providing grant funding to organizations because we know how important it is.

Virginia Fleming

Client**JESPY House**

You should give your ... give advice because you're part of things, too. And, you know, nobody's perfect. You have a right to speak as you feel. If you feel comfortable with something, stand up and speak up.

Charlotte Borgersen**Client****Get FIT / Family Resource Network**

The disabled community they are the experts on their ... on being disabled and what comes with it. Having their voice is just really important, especially when they're always not heard.

Ellie Willoughby**Director of Special Services****Shimon and Sara Birnbaum Jewish Community Center**

Most projects get designed and then you ask the people with disabilities or modify it. Our intention was let's start from the ground up with people with disabilities in mind and having them be part of the planning process. So what we did was our group of individuals that we have in the building they were part of the planning process. We looked at different designs. We talked to them about different avenues and different spaces that they felt that would be beneficial for them.

Caryn Croll**J-cares Intern****Shimon and Sara Birnbaum Jewish Community Center**

We all come together in groups and we help each other with the garden. It's good to be included.

Bryan Harvey**J-cares Intern****Shimon and Sara Birnbaum Jewish Community Center**

There are certain special needs people that have trouble walking so they need help.

Caryn Croll

Some of my friends have crutches or a wheelchair. Sometimes it's hard. But we have our own path for them so they can get better.

Tara Roberts

Our JESPY clients are adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are an important part of this project. And they all were extremely involved, participated, noticed things that some of us who aren't disabled might not have picked up.

Christian Murray

Client

JESPY House

We walked around towards the train station, and we noticed the broken things like sidewalks. On one side of the train station, the stairs are broken.

Michael Jaslow

Client

JESPY House

They wanted to get my input on how the situation is for disabled people. They took me to a grocery store, and they wanted me to assess to see if it's disability accessible. So there were times where, you know, we assessed that sometimes people don't always take the disability world into account.

Bonnielin Swenor

This world still is largely not built or designed for people with disabilities. It's not made for all of us. But we also have to think about the stigma. We call it ableism. Ableism is the stigmatization, discrimination, or even oppression towards people with disabilities. Oftentimes we just think about the gaps in accessibility, but it's the attitudes towards people with disabilities that can be just as exclusionary, and we have to address both components.

Channing Brown

Communications Connector

Allies in Caring

[Speaking American Sign Language]

The biggest challenge, really, is the communication barrier, plus the resources and accessibility which impacts all Deaf people. For instance, most people don't realize this is such a hearing-centric world. For example, if I am shopping at the store, and everyone can hear the intercoms blasting with sales, or people are talking amongst themselves, and I have absolutely no idea what's happening, or what's going on around myself. I'm stuck in their world, so I have to follow their social conventions for communicating. I have to work so hard to bring my level of understanding and accessibility up to par with their own level. This is just a tiny part of our everyday routines, our experiences, and our daily struggles as Deaf people. Communication, accessibility, resources, they really are the toughest things for us.

Peri Nearon

This is new and innovative work for New Jersey. We are asking our grantees to really consider and use the public health model of policy, systems, and environmental change because we are looking for sustainable wide-range systemic change. And so that's very different than creating a one-time project. And we're really looking for work that can be sustained after the funding has ended.

Bonnielin Swenor

We're now at a moment of justice, and disability justice is all about addressing inequities. It is understanding that people with disabilities are the largest minority in the United States and in the whole world. And we face inequities that are baked into our environment, and we have to address those inequities through a community approach. It's not about changing the person. It's about changing the environment, removing the stigma.

Carleton Montgomery

But it takes resources to pay for the materials and the planning pieces that are involved, so I'm really hoping that the program continues, that people see the great value of this program, and that it's actually, to me, having a big impact that goes far beyond those dollars that have been allocated to it so far.

Kaleena Berryman

The beauty of a community is in its differences, and what we found at ALL is that we create spaces that are inclusive, welcoming, and engaging for all people. And what we see is that not only do students with disabilities thrive in these spaces, but students without disabilities thrive as well.

Peri Nearon

This program embraces that notion that we are all better off when we include everyone, and our communities are a better place for it, and our people are healthier when they're engaged in a vibrant diverse community.

Virginia Fleming

I say it this way, we all have bumps in the roads. You go through a road, boom, you go to the, boom, and then you try to go this way. And look at me today. Maybe it helped that we had a couple of bumps in the road. You go through some hard times. You're not always going to have cake and eat it. But here I am today, a strong woman.