My Medicaid Matters

On September 10, 2011, TILRC partnered with Kansas ADAPT to sponsor a Rally in Support of Home and Community Based Services and Supports at the South Steps of the Statehouse in Topeka. The rally was being held to support the efforts of nearly 100 national organizations who were organizing a national “My Medicaid Matters” Rally in support of Medicaid in Washington D.C. on September 21, 2011.

Most people don’t realize how important Medicaid is to millions of Americans, including 350,000 Kansans. It pays for all kinds of healthcare like hospital and doctor services; lab and x-ray services; prescription medications and durable medical equipment, like walkers and wheelchairs. It also pays for the home community-based services and supports that many low-income seniors and people with disabilities depend on to get the help they need to be able to live in their own homes.

The disability community organized the “My Medicaid Matters” Rally to send a strong message to Congress that proposals to “reform” Medicaid which end up cutting services and shifting costs to the states are not REAL Medicaid reform! Real reform must not only contain costs, but also protects the civil rights of seniors and people with disabilities!

About 75 people attended the Topeka rally to send a message to state policymakers, who are looking for ways to contain the
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rising cost of medicaid in kansas, that we support reforms that will expand the use of home and community-based services, expand consumer-directed service options and reorganize medicaid services to eliminate wasteful bureaucracy.

besides all the changes to medicaid being considered by congress there will be many important issues that disability rights advocates and consumers of medicaid long-term services and support will want to keep abreast of as a new legislative session begins in january 2012. some issues are:

how will plans to move the home and community based (hcbs) wavier programs to the department on aging (which is to be renamed the kansas department for aging and disability thanks to strong advocacy by tilrc and others) and the new payroll and monitoring system for attendant care workers effect services? will the governor really be able to cut medicaid spending by one third without reducing benefits or provider rates by putting all our medicaid programs, including the hcbs waivers, in the hands of private managed care companies? will the legislature find a way to serve the thousands of people on hcbs waiting lists?

these are just some of the issues that kansans with disabilities and their allies will need to monitor and be prepared to speak out on in order to ensure that seniors and people with disabilities are able to get the help they need to live independently in their own homes and communities.

january 2012
Five Good Reasons to Support HCBS Waiver Programs

1. **HCBS boosts state economies.** Medicaid brings new money into states in the form of federal matching dollars that help create jobs and stimulate economic growth. The federal government pays about 60% of the total cost of the care in all Kansas waiver programs.

2. **HCBS can save the state money over time.** On average HCBS costs far less than state institutions and limiting access to HCBS programs can increase the use of more costly institutional care. A 2009 study found that, over a 10-year period, states with well-established HCBS programs saw a significant reduction in Medicaid long-term care spending.

3. **HCBS programs helps ease the load on informal caregivers.** Of the over 50 million people who provide informal care to friends and family more than 1/3 cut back on household spending, 1/3 limit their work hours, and approximately 1/4 postpone personal medical care. Businesses lose an estimated $33.6 billion annually because of the demands that caregiving places on full-time employees. Economic activity is reduced because caregivers earn and send less, and their medical costs end up being higher because they postpone their own medical care until their health problems are more advanced and more expensive to treat.

4. **Most consumers who need long-term care prefer HCBS.** About 80 percent of people needing long-term services would prefer community-based care over institutional care.

5. **The Lack of HCBS options may violate the Supreme Court’s Olmstead decision.** In the 1999 case of *Olmstead v. L.C.*, the Supreme Court held that unjustified institutionalization of people with disabilities who were able to function in the community constituted a form of discrimination that violates the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Failure to provide HCBS options may violate *Olmstead* and the ADA because they place individuals at risk of institutionalization.

From *Five Good Reasons Why States Shouldn’t Cut Home and Community-Based Services in Medicaid* by Families USA, July 2010 (http://familiesusa2.org/assets/pdfs/long-term-care/Five-Good-Reasons.pdf)
Let us help you achieve your independent living goals

If you are a TILRC consumer you may already know how we help people who want to transition from an institution, like a nursing facility, back into the community or how we help folks get the attendant care services they need through the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver Programs, but you may not be aware of all the other ways we help people with disabilities maintain or increase their independence. Here are just a few of the ways our advocates can help you be more independent in many aspects of daily living. All of these services can be provided on an individual basis or in a group /classroom setting:

HOUSING – Finding affordable, accessible, integrated housing is never easy. We can help you find the housing that fits your needs. We can connect you with programs to make accessible modifications to your home. If you are a renter we can educate you on your rights and responsibilities or provide assistance requesting reasonable accommodations.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY – Accessing the right kinds of assistive technology can dramatically enhance a person’s independence. We can help you find resources and funding for all kinds of assistive technology like audible smoke alarms, video telephones or hand controls for your vehicle.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS – If you are adjusting to a newly acquired or advancing disability or just new to living in your own place you may want some help learning the skills you need to run your own household. We can help you learn cooking, housekeeping, organizational and other daily living skills. If you’re having trouble keeping a handle on your finances we can help you develop a budget or set up bill payment services.

TRANSPORTATION – If you need accessible transportation or don’t drive just getting around in the community can be a challenge. Whether you need to learn to ride the bus or apply for the LIFT Paratransit Service, we can help you navigate the public transit system. We can also provide assistance with accessing Medicaid transportation for medical appointments.

WORK – If you want to work we can help you access services and programs provided by Kansas Vocational Rehabilitation Services to look for a job, put together a resumé or we can connect you with work incentive programs, like the Working Healthy Program or Social Security’s Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS).

BENEFITS – If you need assistance in finding out about or obtaining the benefits you are eligible for we can help. TILRC has trained staff with a proven track record in assisting folks in obtaining Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. We can also help you find the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan that is right for you.

SOCIALIZATION – We can provide information on social and recreational activities in our community and welcome your involvement in events organized by TILRC’s Social and Recreational Committee.

SELF-ADVOCACY – Nobody knows what you need better than you. We can help you learn how to effectively communicate your needs to policymakers, bureaucrats and others, so you can speak up for your own rights.

These are just some of the many ways we can help you live a more independent lifestyle. To learn more call 233-4572 and ask for Evan (outside the Topeka area call 1-800-443-2207).
The George Wolf Youth Internship Program (GWYP) is a six week long summer youth employment program (with an emphasis on students with disabilities) that provides junior high and high school age students the opportunity to gain significant work experience while learning about disability rights and the independent living movement. During the internship TILRC staff assists the interns in completing an advocacy project relating to disability rights.

This past summer the interns conducted accessibility surveys at Old Prairie Town Park and Lake Shawnee and then gave a presentation to city and county staff reporting on their findings. Previously, the 2007 interns had conducted access surveys in area parks and had presented their findings to city and county officials including recommendations on ways they could improve access for people with disabilities. The 2011 interns’ task was to follow-up on the previous recommendations from 2007 to see what changes had been made and to evaluate any new features in the parks that had been build since the previous surveys.

The 2011 interns presented their findings and recommendations to Shawnee County Parks Director John Kennedy and Topeka Parks and Recreation Department Director of Planning and Development Bill Riphahn. In their presentation the interns reported that they were generally pleased with accessibility at both locations and provided recommendations on options for addressing the minor deficiencies they had found.

Both Kennedy and Riphahn expressed their appreciation to the interns for their input. Riphahn discussed some the current projects that the city is working on and Kennedy encouraged the interns to share any future concerns regarding parks access and told them their input was always welcomed. There was also some discussion on how the proposed consolidation of the county and city parks departments might effect future operations and planning activities.

Following their presentation, TILRC Executive Director Mike Oxford congratulated the interns on a their work and reminded them that as they mature we will be relying on them to insure that our community remains fully accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.
TILRC Social and Recreational Committee wants your ideas for 2012 activities

This past spring the TILRC Social and Recreational Committee began organizing fun activities for TILRC consumers. Because people had expressed an interest in doing some fishing, two fishing outings were organized.

About half a dozen TILRC consumers participated in morning fishing excursions to the ponds at MacLennan Park near the governor’s mansion at Cedar Crest on May 27, 2011 and to Westlake pond in Gage Park on July 1, 2011. All the equipment, bait and fishing licenses were provided by TILRC and TILRC staff members were there to provide assistance to the anglers.

Early next spring the Social and Recreational Committee will begin planning activities for 2012. If you have ideas for some fun activities for next year or would like to help with the committee you are encouraged to contact Evan at 233-4572.
Local artists with disabilities showcased at ADA Anniversary Art Show

To celebrate this year’s anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, TILRC sponsored an art exhibit featuring the works of local artists with disabilities. The art exhibit was held the evening of August 5, 2011, to coincide with Downtown Topeka’s monthly First Friday Art Walk.

Over a dozen artists displayed original artwork in various mediums in the Oxford Building conference room at 408 S.W. Jackson Street. Over one hundred people visited the art exhibit. Members of the public were invited to cast their votes for their three favorite artists and cash prizes of $100, $50 and $25 were awarded to the first, second and third places winners.

Tessa Goupil was the first place winner. Ms. Goupil has a background in graphic design and uses her computer to create many of her drawings. Many of her works are on a fantasy theme, but a favorite on display at the show was a drawing of her son, Sean.

The second place winner was Jenny Lynn Unrein. Ms. Unrein, with the assistance of her mother Wendi Unrein, has turned her talent and love of drawing into a successful business – JennyLU Designs. Much of the proceeds from her work are donated to various not-for-profit organizations, particularly those that serve young people with disabilities.

Third prize went to Claudia Hennessy. Ms. Hennessey has enjoyed painting and drawing since she was a small child. She recently won the National Easter Lily contest for Easter Seals Disability Services. Her work was selected as one of the six designs that were used on that year’s Easter Seals stamps.

The show was thoroughly enjoyed by all and TILRC was pleased to offer local artists with disabilities the opportunity to display their work and to recognize their abilities and talent.

Members of the public enjoyed the opportunity to interact with many of the artists, like 3rd place winner Claudia Hennessy.
Long Range Transportation Plan will identify future transportation priorities

Every five years the Metropolitan Topeka Planning Organization (MTPO), which is in charge transportation planning for Topeka and the surrounding area, is required to update their Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The LRTP guides how regional transportation projects are determined and how federal transportation funds will be invested. The current plan extends to 2034, so the update that is now being developed will take us out to 2040.

As part of the plan development process the MTPO is required to gather public input from stakeholders, including people with disabilities. The MTPO has hired URS Corporation (URS), a national engineering and planning firm that works on many long range transportation plans across the country to assist in developing the update to the LRTP. Jim Meyer, Senior Transportation Planner with URS, is responsible for overseeing the transportation analysis and public participation portion of the Topeka Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

Mr. Meyer describes the LRTP as “a blueprint or working document that takes a look at the comprehensive overview of the entire regional transportation system.” It is a multi-modal plan which means “we’re looking at every mode of transportation, roadways, public transportation and non-motorized - bicycles and pedestrians.”

Meyer explains that the goal of the LRTP is to “establish a vision for what transportation is going to look like out 30 years to the year 2040.” As part of their analysis, URS will look at potential funding and help the MTPO prioritize which projects move forward. Meyer says, “We’re identifying what the deficiencies are, what we think some of the future needs are going to be and ultimately we’ll begin to identify improvements or action items to get us towards implementation.”

Meyer says that input from people with disabilities on the LRTP is important because, “With some of the public transportation cuts that have been happening in recent months and over the last couple of years, I think that’s probably had a greater impact on people with disabilities. I think this plan is an opportunity to take a look at public transportation and support their efforts in what they’re planning or would like to see with increased service and really rebuilding the public transportation throughout the region.”

The process of updating the LRTP began this summer and will continue through the spring of 2012. Public participation opportunities so far have included two open house/community workshop events (one in August and another one in November), stakeholder meetings, small group sessions (including one with senior transportation providers and one with people that use accessible transportation) and two online surveys to gather community views on travel and mobility in the metropolitan area. Information on the public participation process is available on the LRTP website at: http://www.topekampo.org/index.html or by calling the MTPO staff at 368-3014.

Public transportation issues were prominent in the discussions at the both community workshops and in the responses to the surveys. Meyer said, “I think we have had good public
input so far through the open houses and surveys and I think public transportation has been high on the list of what people are interested in and concerned about.”

People can still submit comments on the website at: http://www.topekampo.org/get_involved.html or you can mail comments to Jim Meyer, URS Corporation, 100 South Fifth Street, Suite 1500, Minneapolis, MN 55402. There is also an LRTP Facebook page where you can leave comments and find updated information on the LRTP.

The final draft of the 2040 Topeka Area Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is expected to be completed by late February 2012. At that time the Metropolitan Topeka Planning Organization (MTPO) will review and approve a final draft of the plan. Beginning March 1, 2012 “there will be a 30 day public review period when people can review the LRTP, the recommendations and then ultimately provide comments and input,” says Meyers. Following the public comment period the final document will be reviewed and adopted by the MTPO.

Meyer encourages people with disabilities and their allies to continue to provide comments on any multi-modal transportation issues that are important to them and particularly to utilize the LRTP as “an opportunity to start a process of rebuilding and getting public transportation back to where it was.”

The 2012 Kansas Legislative Session Began January 9th!
Do you know who your legislators are?

Shawnee County Kansas Legislators:

Senator Laura Kelly (D), District 18, 296-7365, Laura.Kelly@senate.ks.gov
Senator Anthony Hensley (D), District 19, 296-3245, Anthony.Hensley@senate.ks.gov
Senator Vicki Schmidt (R), District 20, 296-7374, Vicki.Schmidt@senate.ks.gov
Rep. Trent LeDoux (R), District 50, trent.ledoux@house.ks.gov
Rep. Mike Burgess (R), District 51, 296-7653, mike.burgess@house.ks.gov
Rep. Lana Gordon (R), District 52, 296-7652, lana.gordon@house.ks.gov
Rep. Ann Mah (D), District 53, 296-7668, ann.mah@house.ks.gov
Rep. Joe Patton (R), District 54, 296-7693, joe.patton@house.ks.gov
Rep. Annie Kuether (D), District 55, 296-7669, annie.kuether@house.ks.gov
Rep. Annie Tietze (D), District 56, 296-7648, annie.tietze@house.ks.gov
Rep. Sean Gatewood (D), District 57, 296-7648, sean.gatewood@house.ks.gov
Rep. Harold Lane (D), District 58, 296-7650, harold.lane@house.ks.gov

If you don’t know what Senate or House District you are in, you can find out by calling 1-800-432-3924 or by going to: http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/vote/
Get free help preparing your taxes

TOPEKA – Free E-File income tax preparation help is now available at sites across Kansas through the April 17 filing deadline.

One of the largest sites will be at the Docking State Office Building, 915 SW Harrison St., Room 163. The Docking site is open 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The program offers tax help to low and moderate income people, generally earning $49,000 or less, who cannot prepare their own tax returns. Volunteer tax preparers can help with special credits, such as Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Credit for the Elderly or the Disabled for which some filers may qualify.

AARP Kansas also offers Tax-Aide through the IRS-sponsored Tax Counseling for the Elderly program at additional sites throughout Kansas. Those sites provide free tax help to people who are 60 years and older.

Items taxpayers should bring with them to have their tax returns prepared include:

- A copy of last year’s federal and state income tax return, if they have one
- Photo identification
- Birth dates and social security cards for the taxpayer, spouse and any children in the household born before Dec. 31, 2011
- Wage and earning statements such as W-2 forms from all employers, W-2G gambling income, and 1099(R) from pension, annuity, retirement or profit-sharing plans, IRAs, and insurance contract distributions, interest and dividend statements from banks (form1099INT), unemployment insurance benefit statements received any time in 2011 (1099-G), and all other 1098 and 1099 forms
- Statements received from a mortgage company during 2011
- College expense information for college students
- Other relevant information about income and expenses such as total amount paid for day care and the day care provider’s federal identifying number, and any notices sent to the taxpayer by the IRS in 2011.
- Workers with Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINS) should bring the ITIN card sent to them by the IRS.

The department’s year-round Taxpayer Assistance Center is located in room 150 of the Docking Building. It also offers Kansas income tax return and homestead claim assistance and is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

No appointment is required at either location, assistance is provided on first come first served basis. For more information, call the Kansas Department of Revenue, 785-368-8222.

To locate the nearest VITA site, call 1-800-906-9887. A list of AARP Kansas Tax-Aide sites is available by calling 1-888-227-7669.
Need help with your energy bills?
SRS is now accepting applications for Low Income Energy Assistance Program

The Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) will be accepting applications for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) from Wednesday, January 18 through Friday, March 30, 2012.

LIEAP provides an annual benefit to help qualifying households pay winter heating bills. Individuals with disabilities, elderly persons, and families with children are the primary groups assisted. An average benefit of $262.88 was provided to 62,000 households in 2011.

To qualify, applicants must be responsible for direct payment of their heating bills. Income eligibility guidelines are set at 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Persons with incomes within the following guidelines may receive LIEAP benefits:

- If one person is living at the address the maximum allowable monthly income is $1,180.
- If two people are living at the address the maximum allowable monthly income is $1,594.
- If three people are living at the address the maximum allowable monthly income is $2,008.
- If four people are living at the address the maximum allowable monthly income is $2,422.
- If five people are living at the address the maximum allowable monthly income is $2,836.
- For each additional person living at the address add $414.

The level of benefit varies according to household income, number of persons living at the address, type of dwelling, type of heating fuel, and utility rates. Applicants must demonstrate they have made payments on their heating utility bill two out of the last three months and those payments must be equal to or exceed $80 or the total balance due on their energy bills whichever is less.

Applications for the program have been mailed to households who received energy assistance last year, along with other targeted low-income families, including those who received food, cash or medical assistance in December. LIEAP applications are available at local SRS offices or can be requested by calling toll-free 1-800-432-0043. Visit www.srs.ks.gov to apply online.

Information provided by the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services
Address Service Requested.

Let us know about any changes.
Just check the appropriate box and mail the form back to us at:
Topeka Independent Living
c/o Kevin Siek
501 SW Jackson St.
Topeka, KS 66603

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☐ Audio Cassette

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