



BRAIN INJURY ADVISORY BOARD ANNUAL REPORT

2023

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Preface

As we begin another year of service, it is important to reflect on the profound impact of brain injuries on the citizens of Pennsylvania. Within the intricate fabric of our state's diverse communities, individuals and families cope with the consequences of brain injury—be it from accidents, sports-related injuries, substance use, violence, or medical conditions.

In Pennsylvania, the prevalence of brain injuries highlights the urgent need for comprehensive support and advocacy. From urban centers to rural landscapes, no corner of our state is untouched by the challenges posed by brain injury. As stewards of empathy and progress, it is necessary for us to address these challenges head-on and ensure that every Pennsylvanian affected by brain injury receives the support and resources they need to live an everyday life.

This annual report serves as a testament to our commitment to the citizens of Pennsylvania. It chronicles the efforts to raise awareness, advocate for policy change, and provide essential services to those in need. By shining a spotlight on the impact of brain injury within our state, we hope to inspire action and foster a culture of compassion and support for all. As you read through these pages, we invite you to consider the profound impact of brain injury on our fellow citizens and the pivotal role that your support and advocacy can play in shaping a brighter future for Pennsylvania.

Board Overview

The Department of Health (Department) formed the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Advisory Board (Board) in 2000 to support the responsibilities essential to the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) Planning and Implementation Grant process, which became the Administration for Community Living (ACL) TBI State Partnership Grant. The Department has continued to support the Board while utilizing HRSA and Administration for Community Living (ACL) funding for other TBI programming. In December of 2023, the Board received approval from the Secretary of the Department of Health to officially change the Board's name to the Brain Injury Advisory Board. This change aligns with the Board's commitment to inclusivity and facilitates a more understanding and responsive approach to the diverse challenges encountered by individuals affected by all forms of acquired brain injuries.

The Board consists of 22 voting members and is comprised of a variety of stakeholders representing:

- Individuals with a brain injury
- Family members and caregivers of individuals with a brain injury
- Community-based organizations in brain injury service provision and advocacy
- Researchers
- State agencies and offices
- Disability Rights Pennsylvania
- Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association (RCPA)

The Board provides advice and expertise to the Pennsylvania Department of Health in the determination of service and support needs of individuals with brain injuries and the implementation of services to those individuals and their families and caregivers. The Board plays an integral role in making recommendations regarding future activities to be placed in the Brain Injury State Action Plan, thereby improving access to brain injury services in Pennsylvania through information and education.

Brain Injury Data

Pennsylvania Statistics:

- 543,288 people in PA living with brain injury related disabilities
- 17,107 citizens age 19 or younger have sports-related brain injuries, with over 15,000 seen in the ER in Pennsylvania
- 138,600 new brain injuries sustained by adults and children each year
- Approximately 50% of individuals participating in substance use treatment have a brain injury
- 5,146 citizens died from fatal substance use overdoses in 2022
- Since 2018, 75,816 doses of naloxone have been administered to prevent an overdose.
- More than 85% of all TBIs involve lack of seatbelts, improper fit of a helmet, use of alcohol and drugs or falls (especially in older adults)

BIAPA (2021,) DDAP(2022)

Many people who experience a mild brain injury, such as a concussion, receive medical care from a physician's office, urgent care center or perhaps no medical attention at all. The data is underrepresented and not reflected above because reporting is not required for TBI treated in settings other than hospitals. It is also unknown how prevalent brain injury related disabilities are in Pennsylvania because prevalence data is not currently collected. Also missing from the data is a large portion of non-traumatic brain injuries.

Nationally (by CDC report):

- An estimated 2.8 million people sustain a TBI annually.¹ Of them:
 - 50,000 die,
 - 282,000 are hospitalized, and
 - 2.5 million, nearly 90%, are treated and released from an emergency department.
- TBI is a contributing factor to a third (30%) of all injury-related deaths in the United States.¹
- Every day, 192 people in the United States die from injuries that include TBI.
- Most TBIs that occur each year are mild, commonly called concussions.
- Direct medical costs and indirect costs of TBI, such as lost productivity, totaled an estimated \$60 billion in the United States in 2000.

Most common causes of TBI

- Falls
- Fire-arm-related injury
- Motor vehicle crashes
- Assaults
 - Falls lead to nearly half of the TBI-related hospitalizations
 - Firearm-related suicide is the most common cause of TBI-related deaths in the United States
 - Motor vehicle crashes and assaults are other common ways a person may get a TBI.

CDC (2021)

BRAIN INJURY PROGRAM REPORT

Pennsylvania Department of Health's Brain Injury Programs

The Department of Health receives funding for brain injury programs through state funding and two federal grants- the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, and the Administration for Community Living (ACL) Traumatic Brain Injury State Partnership Program Grant. The following programs provide services and supports to individuals with traumatic and/or non-traumatic brain injuries throughout the lifespan, caregivers, providers, and professionals.

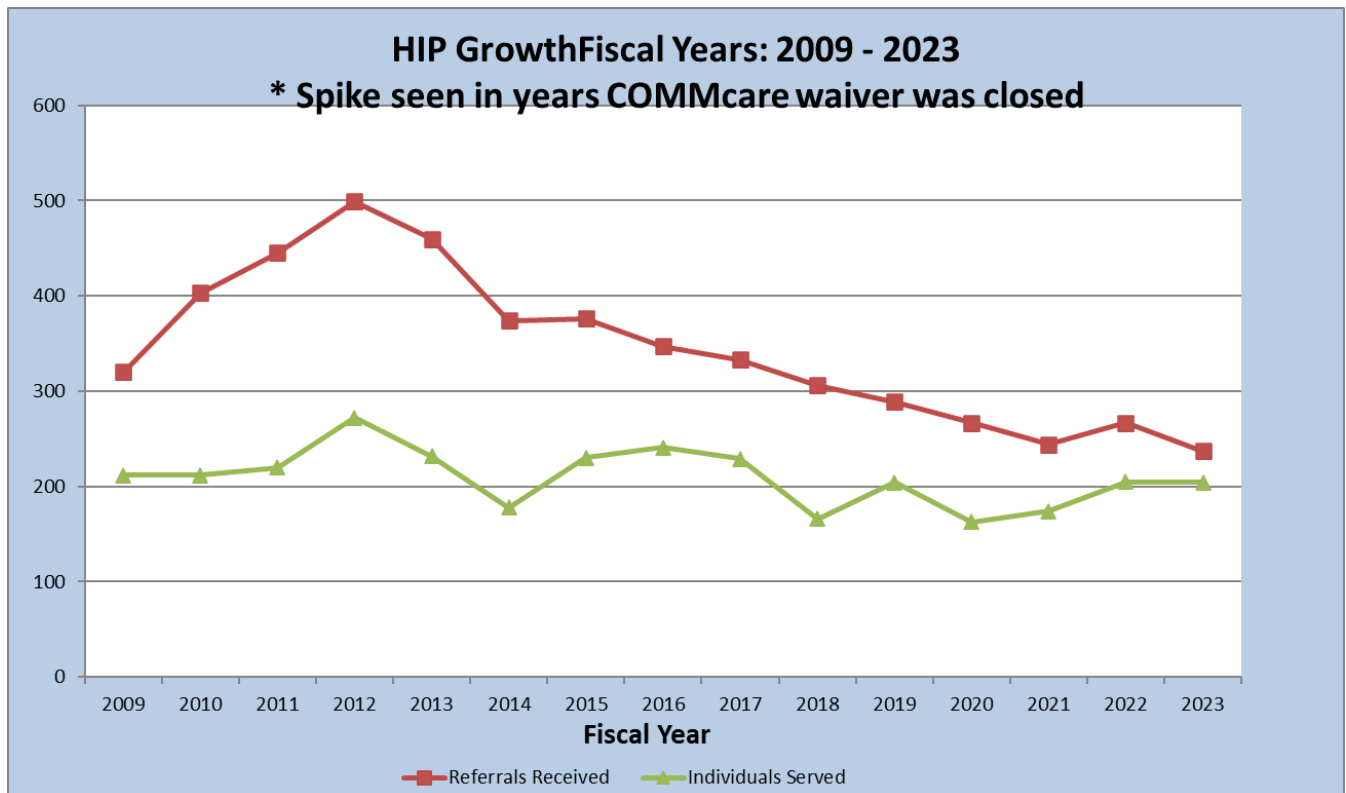
State Funded Program

The only state funding dedicated to the provision of brain injury services and supports is through the Emergency Medical Services Act of 1985. This act established the Catastrophic Medical and Rehabilitation Fund, which states funding is to be made available for trauma victims to purchase medical, rehabilitation and attendant care services when all alternative financial resources have been exhausted. These funds are acquired through traffic violations. The following program was established to distribute those funds:

Head Injury Program

The Head Injury Program (HIP) was created in 1988 with the goal of helping individuals with a TBI live as independently as possible in their homes and communities by providing funding for qualified individuals to receive head injury rehabilitation services. Enrolled individuals may receive up to 12 months or \$100,000 for rehabilitation services, followed by a maximum of six consecutive months or \$1,000 for case management to assist with transition out of the HIP. The goal of the program is to help individuals with a TBI live as independently as possible in their homes and communities. In December 2018, the age limit to apply for the HIP was decreased from 21 to 18 years of age. HIP funding decreased from \$4.3 million in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2021/2022 to \$4.2 million in SFY 2022/2023. In SFY 2023/2024, the approved budget was **decreased** to \$4.1 million. Per House Bill 1459, \$250,000 of the HIP budget is to be allocated to Emergency Responder Mental Wellness and Stress Management. Therefore, \$3.85 million will be used for the HIP in SFY 2023/2024.

Referencing the chart below, **there were a total of 204 individuals served in SFY 2023**, which is a very slight decrease from SFY 2022. Referrals to the program are the lowest they have been at 237 referrals received in SFY 22-23. The Department has increased outreach in an effort to promote referrals to the HIP. Referral numbers do not include re-enrollments, which began to be considered for individuals in need of additional rehabilitation in August of 2021. In SFY 22-23, 10 re-enrollments application were accepted for additional rehabilitation.



Pre-enrollment Assistance

Pre-enrollment Assistance is a service that helps individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and their family members apply for brain injury services through the Department of Health’s (DOH) Head Injury Program (HIP) and provide information regarding other brain injury services offered in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A Pre-enrollment Assistance Coordinator is assigned to each applicant of the HIP. The coordinator is available to assist individuals in their home, community, or hospital. They will help individuals complete the application process needed to become enrolled in HIP.

Coordinators will:

- Provide information about the HIP.
- Meet with applicants and family members to assess all available financial help.
- Assist applicants and family members in identifying the best resources and programs to meet rehabilitation needs.
- Provide information, referral, and contact information on other resources available in Pennsylvania.
- Assist with obtaining medical records.
- Assist in choosing a HIP rehabilitation provider for an assessment

To learn more about HIP or to request an application, please contact HIP at:

Phone: (717) 772-2763

Email: RA-DHBFHHIP@pa.gov

Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Funded Programs

Title V funding is a key source of support for promoting and improving the health and well-being of the nation's mothers, children-including children with special needs, and their families. Pennsylvania is one of the few states to use this funding for the provision of brain injury services and supports for children with and without special health care needs. The following programs are funded through the Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant:

Acquired Brain Injury Program

The Acquired Brain Injury Program (ABIP) was created in 2020 with funding made available through the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant. At the time of its creation, the ABIP was developed to provide specialized brain injury rehabilitation for individuals aged 18-21 with a non-traumatic acquired brain injury. The intent was to bridge a gap for individuals who are beyond school age, but not yet of the age to apply for waiver services. In June of 2021, due to a low number of referrals, the program was updated to expand the age range for eligibility to 18-25. In 2023, six referrals were received for a total of 19 referrals since the inception of the program. Out of the 19 referrals, six individuals received rehabilitation services. Due to the limited interest in the ABIP, the Department made the decision to terminate the ABIP effective May 31, 2024.

BrainSTEPS (Strategies Teaching Educators, Parents, and Students)

The Department, in partnership with Department of Education and BIAPA, has implemented BrainSTEPS since 2007. BrainSTEPS is a child and adolescent brain injury school re-entry program to assist PA schools in creating appropriate educational plans for students, following a TBI or nTBI. It is comprised of 230+ brain injury consultants serving on regional teams based out of all 29 educational Intermediate Units and two school districts.

To ensure children and adolescents with a TBI or nTBI receive care in a well-functioning system through high school graduation, BrainSTEPS provides the following supports to students, their families or caregivers, and schools:

- Identification of students with brain injury
- School re-entry planning
- Educational plan development, including IEP/504 Plan support, academic adjustments/ accommodations, and strategy selection
- Teacher, peer, and family training
- Annual monitoring of student until graduation
- Family support and resource sharing
- Return to Learn concussion management
- Facilitation of communication between healthcare provider, school staff, and family

Anyone can refer a student to the program through the following ways:

- **Website:** <http://www.brainsteps.net>
- **Phone:** (724) 944-6542

In 2023, BrainSTEPS received a total of 477 referrals and provided 1,880 consultation hours to support 654 students with a TBI or nTBI. BrainSTEPS implemented a social media program promotion campaign to target counties with low referral rates. BrainSTEPS also developed a promotional program poster, which contained information about the program, eligibility requirements, and a QR code that directs individuals to the referral page allowing them to easily refer a student in an accessible manner. This was disseminated in 2023 to all 3,287 public schools in Pa. The poster contains information about the program, eligibility requirements, and a QR code that directs individuals to the referral page allowing them to easily refer a student in an accessible manner.

Brain Injury and Opioids Training Program

DOH contracts with the Brain Injury Association of PA (BIAPA) to develop and provide the Brain Injury and Opioids training program. The purpose of the program is to educate brain injury and substance use professionals on the correlation between brain injury and opioid use. Training content includes basic information about brain injury, screening for brain injury, factors that impact the response to traditional treatment for those with cognitive impairment, suggested ways to adapt interventions to meet the needs of individuals with brain injury, and brain injury resources. In 2023, BIAPA provided 26 trainings and have trained over 700 professionals. Once trained, individuals are invited to an “Ask the Expert” Lunch and Learn session. It is an informal meeting held virtually to provide an opportunity to discuss ways to apply the training to their work with individuals with brain injury. Topics are driven by the attendees and have included tools to identify cognitive symptoms, using case examples for problem solving, and ideas about adapting treatment to meet the needs of clients with cognitive impairments. BIAPA has also created an asynchronous learning tool on screening for a history of brain injury that can be found on their website. The tool is titled: “Brain Injury Symptom Questionnaire: Review of the Use of a Symptom Checklist”.

Connections were made with Chester County Department of Drug and Alcohol Prevention (DDAP) and the systems workgroup worked closely with BIAPA, who made presentations to their providers about the intersection of brain injury and opioids. Further research revealed that Berks County has an on-line application for grants under the Opioid Trust Fund. Further consultation was done with BIA Vermont's staff who worked in ERs to understand how that work was set up, and how it was funded.

Connections were made with Berks County Tower Reading Hospital which is a Center for Excellence (COE) for substance abuse. Consulted with their Warm Hand Off program to see if the workgroup could suggest to BIAPA that they partner with them and Tower Reading Hospital in this Berks County application under the category of acceptable projects, including E Expansion of Warm Hand-off programs, or G Prevention Programs.

Safety In Youth Sports Program

DOH contracts with the Pennsylvania Athletic Trainers Society (PATS) for the Safety in Youth Sports Program (SYSP). SYSP was created as a response to the Safety in Youth Sports Act which includes DOH providing education to students, parents, and coaches on the risks of concussion. PATS contracts with Sport Safety International (SSI) to create the ConcussionWise

educational videos used during the training. During 2023, SSI added Spanish subtitles to those videos. PATS has provided 169 trainings serving 3,173 participants with a majority of them being youth. They have 15 Athletic Trainers who provide this training. PATS has also created an infographic on Second Impact Syndrome (SIS) which occurs when an individual sustains a second brain injury while they are still recovering from an initial concussion. The SIS infographic will be used for a statewide awareness campaign in 2024.

The Pennsylvania Shaken Baby Syndrome (SBS) Prevention Program

The SBS Prevention Program is an injury prevention program supported by the Department. PA Hospitals and birthing centers are required per Act 2001-176, to provide parents with specific educational materials related to the risks and consequences of shaken baby or infant head trauma. The Department oversees the distribution and use of these materials. The Department continues to provide technical assistance to hospitals and birthing centers concerning the requirements of Act 2001-176.

For additional information:

- **Website:** <http://www.health.pa.gov/shakenbabyprogram>
- **Phone:** (717) -772-2763

Administration for Community Living (ACL) Traumatic Brain Injury State Partnership Program Grant

In 2023, the Department continued its work on ACL's TBI State Implementation Partnership Grant. This is a five-year grant that began on August 1st, 2021 and is set to end on July 31st, 2026. The goal of this grant is to create and strengthen systems of services and supports that maximizes the independence, health and well-being of people with traumatic brain injuries across the lifespan, their family members, and their support networks. The Department has five focus areas for this grant: the NeuroResource Facilitation, Intersectionality of Intimate Partner Violence and TBI, Juvenile Justice, Older Adults, and the Brain Injury Advisory Board. In March of 2022, ACL awarded the Department supplemental funding to expand the public health work force. The Department focused these funds on expanding the NeuroResource Facilitation Program to identify and address the service and support gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding will end September 30th, 2024. The following programs are funded through the ACL TBI State Partnership Program Grant:

NeuroResource Facilitation Program (NRFP)

The Department partnered with the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania (BIAPA) to implement the NRFP. This program focuses on helping PA residents with a TBI and nTBI, ages 18 and older, their family members, and caregivers to identify, navigate, and access brain injury resources, services and supports in their local area. The goal of the program is to maximize the health, independence, and overall well-being of individuals with a TBI statewide.

To ensure individuals are able to access the needed services and supports in their geographical location, they are assigned a NeuroResource Facilitator (NRF) located in their region. The NRFP covers the Northeast, Southeast, Northwest, Southwest, and Central regions of the Commonwealth. At the request of the enrolled individuals, services were provided virtually, over the phone, or in-person. From January 1st 2023 to December 31st,

2023, the NRFP received 140 referrals. Of those referrals, there were 33 individuals with a nTBI and 107 individuals with TBI.

Anyone can refer an individual to the program through the following ways:

- **Phone:** (724) 944-6542
- **Email:** RA-DHBFHNRFP@pa.gov

The Department partnered with BIAPA to expand the NRFP to identify the service and support gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and address them. The Department and BIAPA conducted two focus groups with individuals with a brain injury and caregivers to better understand how the pandemic impacted their service and support needs. The following gaps were identified:

1. Social Isolation
2. Access to quality and timely healthcare
3. Employment
4. Compounding symptoms
5. COVID-19 Information

To address the identified gaps, the following actions were taken:

- A bi-monthly support group for individuals with a brain injury that contracted the COVID-19 virus was established and is co-facilitated by two NRFs.
- A series of informational articles relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, accessing healthcare, advocacy in regard to healthcare needs, and safety precautions to prevent exposure was developed and will be disseminated in the BIAPA monthly newsletter.
- A public health emergency preparedness plan was developed and will be disseminated in 2024 to provide individuals with a brain injury and their caregivers information on where to access current and accurate information about public health emergencies, where to find resources to combat the emergency, resources to ensure service and support gaps do not occur, and where to find peer support.

Intersectionality of Intimate Partner Violence and Brain Injury

The Department continued its partnership with Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) to focus on the intersectionality between intimate partner violence (IPV) and TBI. The purpose is to strengthen the response to domestic violence (DV) survivors who may have a brain injury by providing education, outreach, technical assistance, and screening tools to professionals working with the IPV population.

PCADV is a member-led domestic violence coalition that provides support to 59 local domestic violence programs that provide free and confidential services to people who have experienced domestic violence in all 67 counties of the Commonwealth. The Coalition works in collaboration with these member programs to deliver a continuum of services, supports, and systems to help survivors find safety, obtain justice, and build lives free of abuse. In 2022, a survey was completed to assess the current knowledge and needs of the DV shelter staff and a plan to address those needs was developed.

Networking and Collaboration

PCADV hosted regional networking sessions across the Commonwealth to connect domestic violence program staff and emergency medical technicians. These sessions were designed to facilitate connection between these entities since they are often the first points of contact for survivors who may have experienced a brain injury. During this time, they were able to learn what both groups felt would be helpful to have to respond to survivors in these events. The sessions created environments that have allowed this collaboration to thrive after the networking sessions, including advocates engaging in meaningful relationship building with EMTs, which is allowing for ongoing connection and education between all parties.

Training and Education

A significant aspect of the work during this year has been focused on education and awareness. Through training sessions, presentations, and participation in key events such as the Brain Injury Association of PA's annual conference, Emergency Medical Services conferences, and domestic violence advocacy events. These trainings have been offered throughout the Commonwealth and have been offered in both virtual and in-person environments. The medical advocates had the benefit of hearing about Pennsylvania's Department of Health programs related to brain injury in a presentation given by Erika Pae and Amy Deidrick. Advocates from across the state attended a training from Acadia Health on addressing the intersection of TBI and domestic violence. During the past year, they hosted sessions with domestic violence advocates to help move away from formalized TBI screening at intake towards a more holistic discussion-based inquiry that can be done with any survivor in any environment, which means more survivors can be connected to supports.

In 2023:

- 246 training participants at a total of 15 educational offerings.
- 39 counties in PA were represented at these trainings, but this number is likely higher since we do not know all the representation when presenting at statewide or regional conferences.
- EMS Representatives and domestic violence programs from all 67 were invited to at least one educational event on the intersection of brain injury and domestic violence.

Resource Development and Toolkit

PCADV has continued their work to develop materials and resources that are able to be widely shared, even when domestic violence survivors who might have a brain injury choose to not disclose this to advocates or providers. They created county-by-county "Need Help" lists that are available by scanning a QR code that can link anyone who scans it directly to the lists. Each county list has connections to their local domestic violence program, rape crisis center, substance use supports, and information about the Brain Injury Resource Line. This resource was designed to assist domestic violence advocates, EMS providers, and other professionals in discreetly connecting survivors to necessary supports.

The soft pilot of the "Need Help" QR Codes has shown promising results, enhancing safety for survivors while ensuring easy access to essential resources. They stress that it can be used by anyone and put on anything, from a business card to a wrap-around

on the side of an ambulance. The goal is that it can be disseminated widely to ensure that anyone has access to the resources. They continue to work on a toolkit with specific sections for EMTs, DV advocates, brain injury providers, and harm reduction/substance use providers can use to support a person at the intersection of domestic violence and brain injury.

Continued Engagement and Feedback

PCADV values feedback and have actively sought input from EMS providers, domestic violence advocates, and other professionals. This feedback loop has been instrumental in refining their resources and ensuring they align with the identified needs and concerns of our communities. Ongoing engagement through regional networking meetings and additional training sessions reflects the commitment to continuous improvement and collaboration.

Juvenile Justice Technical Assistance and Training

The Department continued its partnership with BIAPA to provide training and technical assistance to existing juvenile justice service providers in PA and conduct outreach to additional juvenile justice providers/professionals. The purpose of the outreach was to offer technical assistance including training and consultation related to identifying youth with a history of brain injury through screening, providing/referring for neurocognitive testing, and facilitating potential resources for youth with brain injury.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the ability to provide outreach activities. With the current labor shortage and the decreased number of juveniles served, many providers did not have the capacity to accept technical assistance. However, assistance was provided virtually and in-person to the following: the Bureau of Juvenile Justice Services, Butler County Probation, Adelphoi Village, George Junior Republic, the Philadelphia Justice Assessment Center, Justice Works, Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center, and the National Partnership for Juvenile Services. Throughout 2023, a total of 12 trainings were provided to approximately 488 professionals working with the juvenile justice population.

TBI Education, Training, and Outreach for Older Adult Populations

The Department continued its partnership with BIAPA to provide outreach and training to professionals working within the older adult population. The purpose of the outreach and training is to increase brain injury awareness of the etiology, causes of sustained injuries, and the impact and management of symptoms. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the ability to provide training and outreach. However, outreach was conducted to Aging Well, the Pennsylvania Department of Aging's Bureau of Protective Services, and Health Care Quality Units. In 2023, a total of 10 trainings were provided to approximately 489 professionals working with the older adult population. Content about aging with brain injury is included in all trainings.

Advisory Board Workgroups

The Brain Injury Advisory Board has established of three workgroups to effectively address the objectives outlined in its action plan. These workgroups bring together individuals with diverse expertise, including healthcare professionals, researchers, advocates, and community stakeholders, to tackle specific goals related to brain injury prevention, treatment,

and rehabilitation. Through structured collaboration and regular meetings, each workgroup focuses on key areas such as education, resources, system collaboration, and health equity for individuals with brain injuries. By harnessing collective knowledge and resources, these workgroups aim to drive innovation, accountability, and progress towards the overarching goals of the Brain Injury State Action Plan, ensuring impactful outcomes for those impacted by brain injury.

Education and Resource Facilitation Workgroup

The Education and Resource Facilitation Workgroup focuses on increasing knowledge and awareness of available brain injury education, training, technical assistance and resources for individuals with a brain injury, their families and caregivers, and professionals.

In 2023, the Education and Resource Facilitation Workgroup spent this year:

1. Training Development

One of the primary focuses has been on developing a brief training module that can be used to provide general knowledge about brain injury and strategies to support survivors. The group created a slide deck that can be used to provide education for non-brain injury professionals who may encounter individuals with brain injury in their work (e.g., attorneys, advocates, teachers) or supportive individuals with personal connections to brain injury survivors. The workgroup has a draft of the training and is currently in the process of revising it to ensure clarity and effectiveness.

2. Consistency in Referrals

The workgroup wants to continue to highlight and advocate for the use of the Brain Injury Resource Line (BIRL) as the primary go-to number for information and support. Strategies to promote the use of BIRL as a central resource are a consistent component to the materials being created, in an effort to enhance supports for individuals seeking assistance related to brain injury.

3. Contest and Partnerships

The workgroup revisited the idea of a contest to raise awareness of brain injury among students. Ideas for prizes, scoring rubrics, and contest categories (elementary, middle, and high school) have been discussed to ensure the contest's effectiveness and impact. The group would like to explore partnerships with organizations to promote and support this initiative. The workgroup is very interested in this idea, but needs further connections with organizations that might be able to fund and 'host' the contest.

4. Blue Envelope and Yellow Dot Programs

Exploratory discussions have begun regarding the Blue Envelope and Yellow Dot programs, aimed at helping first responders identify individuals who may have experienced a brain injury or have another neurological need. Strategies to provide relevant information to first responders on working with individuals with brain injuries are being considered to enhance emergency response and support.

Systems Workgroup

The Systems Workgroup is focused on identifying and establishing partnerships with key state agencies, healthcare providers, and community organizations to enhance services and supports systems for individuals with brain injury and their families.

In 2023, the Systems Workgroup spent this year:

1. Developing relationships with other service systems that are providing services and assistance to individuals with brain injury. This includes outreach and providing brain injury training to the Office of Long-Term Living's (OLTL) Managed Care Organizations (MCOs).
2. Consulted with Alabama's Department of Rehabilitation Services to learn how they partnered with their Department of Mental Health to embed training on brain injury and a screening tool for case managers and how to refer individuals, if they do screen positive. Alabama's April Turner presented at the BIAPA Conference in June of 2023.
3. The group subsequently met with the Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) to look for potential funding sources for the NASHIA Screening tool that Alabama used called Online Brain Injury Screening and Support System (OBISS) which costs about \$7500 per year.
4. Researched other funding options to assist with embedding brain injury training and screening into other services systems and discovered the Opioid Trust Fund in PA, which is administering the opioid settlement funds coming into PA Counties. The Systems Workgroup encouraged and assisted BIA PA to develop and submit a Grant Proposal which must be done on a county-by-county basis, titled *The Pennsylvania Pilot Brain Injury Identification Project*.

Health Equity Workgroup

The Health Equity Workgroup focuses on increasing knowledge and awareness of the Pennsylvania Brain Injury Advisory Board to increase stakeholder diversity and representation and foster greater collaboration.

In 2023, the following efforts have been made by this group on behalf of the Board to increase Board diversity (focusing on increasing the number of Survivor Board members). Through surveying current Board membership, this workgroup found that the Board needs increased participation by more persons of color, men, and those living in urban and rural areas.

The workgroup continued working on the New Board Member On-Boarding Process including:

1. Developed the description and use of the New Attendees Welcome Wagon (implemented some steps during our Board Meetings which have been in place for the last two quarterly Board meetings in 2023).

2. Developed the description and possible use of a Peer Support Liaison to support possible new Board members.
3. Developed a Strengths Survey for Board applicants (though through ongoing conversation it was determined that this was not needed for our on-boarding process).
4. Had further conversations and reviewed with DOH concerning all elements of the Pre-Application Process including a Flyer to be used for new membership recruitment.

In 2024, the Health Equity Workgroup will begin discussions on what the group's new focus will be to bring further Health Equity to the Board and ensure greater equity to and within the brain injury community.

Department of Human Services, Office of Long-Term Living: Community HealthChoices

CHC is a Medicaid managed care program that was developed to enhance access to and improve coordination of physical health benefits and long-term services and supports (LTSS) and to create a person driven, long term support system in which people with physical disabilities have choice, control, and access to a full array of quality services that provide independence, health, and quality of life. The goal of CHC is to serve more people in the community in order to give them the opportunity to live independently, work, and spend more time with their families. LTSS help eligible individuals to perform activities in their home such as bathing, dressing, preparing meals, administering medications and to remain involved in their community. The following individuals may be eligible to qualify for CHC:

- Individuals who are 21 years of age or older and dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid.
- Individuals who are 21 years of age or older and eligible for Medicaid (LTSS) because they need the level of care provided by a nursing facility.
- Individuals currently enrolled in the LIFE Program only if they expressly select to transition from LIFE to a CHC MCO.

The following individuals are **not** eligible for CHC:

- Individuals receiving long-term services and supports through the OBRA waiver and are not nursing facility eligible.
- Individuals who do not meet the Medicaid financial eligibility criteria.
- Individuals who reside in a state veteran's home.

In 2023, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing end to the Public Health Emergency (PHE) continued to cause significant barriers to CHC participants with a TBI receiving services, their families, and service providers. As COVID-19 preventions and restrictions began to end, many congregate settings began the process of reopening. However, many providers faced continuing staffing shortages to provide all the necessary services for participants. These staffing issues continue to impact the whole continuum of health care services for participants at the state level and

nationally. OLTL, the CHC MCOs, and service providers are continually trying to meet participants' needs even with the staffing related issues. During the pandemic, OLTL allowed some services to be provided virtually but as the PHE ended these service flexibilities also ended. OLTL is in the process of evaluating the need and working with CMC to allow some services to be provided virtually in the future. OLTL continues to work and partnered with MCOs to maximize the number of vaccinated participants through outreach, education, and hosting vaccination clinics. OLTL also worked to disburse and monitor the American Rescue Care Plan Act (ARPA) funds to some providers in the CHC program.

Since the end of the PHE, participants are required to go through the MA redetermination process to ensure that they are still eligible for services through the MA program. This process has created a number of issues for participants as they go through the process of redetermining their financial and functional eligibility for MA services. For CHC, OLTL is working with the participants, advocates and providers in an effort to ensure that all participants who are eligible for program services are able to maintain their eligibility. A number of processes have been created to assist with the process.

The MCOs participating in CHC include:

AmeriHealth Caritas

Website: www.amerihealthcaritaschc.com

Phone: 1-855-235-5115 (TTY 1-800-235-5112)

PA Health and Wellness

Website: www.PAHealthWellness.com

Phone: 1-844-626-6813 (TTY 1-844-349-8916)

UPMC Community HealthChoices

Website: www.upmchealthplan.com/chc

Phone: 1-844-833-0523 (TTY 711)

Keystone First

Website: www.keystonefirstchc.com

Phone: 1-855-332-0729 (TTY 1-855-235-4976)

OLTL will continue to provide information about relevant CHC topics through various means on specific topics, narrated training segments and statewide provider assistance events. Information on CHC is located on DHS's website at: www.HealthChoices.pa.gov. OLTL continues to provide ongoing CHC updates at stakeholder's meetings and other webinars as requested. OLTL has both a Provider and Participant Helpline as resource information contacts.

The following resources are available:

RESOURCE INFORMATION

CHC LISTSERV // STAY INFORMED: <http://listserv.dpw.state.pa.us/oltl-community-healthchoices.html>

COMMUNITY HEALTHCHOICES WEBSITE: www.healthchoices.pa.gov

MLTSS SUBMAAC WEBSITE:
www.dhs.pa.gov/communitypartners/informationforadvocatesandstakeholders/mltss

EMAIL COMMENTS TO: RA-PWCHC@pa.gov

OLTL PROVIDER LINE: 1-800-932-0939

OLTL PARTICIPANT LINE: 1-800-757-5042

INDEPENDENT ENROLLMENT BROKER: 1-844-824-3655 or (TTY 1-833-254-0690)
or visit www.enrollchc.com

BRAIN INJURY PARTNERS

BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA (BIAPA)

The Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania was formed in 2001, with a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors. The Association works to prevent brain injury and improve the quality of life for people who have experienced brain injury, their family members and caregivers through support, education, advocacy, and research. The work of the Association is accomplished through paid professional staff and hundreds of volunteers. BIAPA is the official Pennsylvania state-chartered affiliate of the Brain Injury Association of America. BIAPA offers the following programs:

- **Brain Injury Resource Line (BIRL)**

The Brain Injury Resource Line is maintained by the BIAPA. It is designed to provide resource information to all callers. In 2023, BIRL received 359 new calls. The BIRL is managed by the BIAPA Director of Programs and staffed by trained volunteers that work as a team and continue to use the online resource manual that was developed and implemented last year. This manual is in a database format that allows for editing in real time in a dynamic fashion, eliminating the need for updating versions. New sections and resources are added regularly. BIRL volunteers participate in ongoing training and mentoring to increase their capacity to assist callers. They participate in quarterly virtual meetings and attend an in-person training annually at the BIAPA conference.

- **Support Groups**

As highlighted in previous years, brain injury support groups are the front-line tools of affiliation for individuals with brain injury and their families. BIAPA maintains contact with these support groups to provide information and support as needed and works with individuals to start new groups in the communities where they live.

As concerns and restrictions resulting from COVID-19 decreased, many of the community-based local support groups that did not hold in-person meetings in 2022 have reconvened and

some continue to offer a virtual option. A listing of groups, including how they meet, is posted on the BIAPA website at <https://biapa.org/programs/support/>. A link to the list is included in the BIAPA e- newsletter each month. There are currently 35 local support groups listed.

BIAPA continues to offer a statewide virtual support group for survivors and their supporters that meets monthly and plans to continue this indefinitely. The "Coping with COVID," support group, implemented in December 2022 to support individuals with brain injury and their supporters who are struggling with COVID-related issues will continue through September 2024 and will be broadened to include other health concerns. BIAPA implemented a Caregiver Support group in 2023 that meets virtually once each month. Plans to add a Caregiver Support group specifically for parents of children and adolescents with brain injury are in process.

- **Brain Injury Ambassador Program**

The Pennsylvania Brain Injury Ambassador Program, implemented in the Spring of 2020, remains in place. It is geared toward families and caregivers of persons with brain injury coming through in-patient rehabilitation hospitals throughout Pennsylvania. The goal of this program is to connect with families, early in the individual's recovery, to let them know that there is hope and resources available to them after brain injury. Six trained Brain Injury Ambassadors work with families referred by liaisons from participating rehabilitation facilities in their region to share information about brain injury services and supports they may need in the future. Ambassadors establish a communication method so families and caregivers can receive the BIAPA newsletter and let them know about the BIRL which they can call if help is needed in the future.

While the original intent was to meet families in person, all contacts have been virtual since the implementation and that will be maintained based on the efficiency of these communications. One new provider partnered with BIAPA on this initiative in 2023 and another is in the onboarding process. The total number of inpatient rehabilitation hospitals actively making referrals is 9. There are 4 rehab hospitals who participated in the past but have not been active this There are 3 new potential partners. There were 71 new referrals received in 2023, bringing the total number of referrals to 216 through the end of 2023.

- **ReDiscover U Program**

BIAPA assumed the ReDiscover U program in January 2023 at the request of the Council on Brain Injury which created, implemented, and administered the program before their dissolution. This adult evening school style, virtual program met weekly throughout 2023 with classes on various topics ranging from Chair Yoga to Art Therapy to Share Nights. Average number of participants per class, which were all individuals with brain injuries, was 12.

- **Clinical Forum**

BIAPA assumed the Clinical Forum Series in January 2023 at the request of the Council on Brain Injury which created, implemented, and administered the program previous to their dissolution. This educational program in virtual format offered free trainings geared toward professionals. Clinical Forums were free of charge and also helped individuals certified by the Academy of Certified Brain Injury Specialist earn their necessary contact hours. The topics were:

- Applied Behavior Analysis for Brain Injury Professionals

- Behavioral Activation Treatment to Treat Anxiety and Depression in People Living with Chronic Moderate-Severe Traumatic Brain Injury: Treatment Protocol and Preliminary Findings
- Developing Evidence-Based Treatment by Utilizing Data: Examples from University of Pittsburgh's Epidemiology Data Center: Approaches and Decisions in Acute Pediatric TBI

PA BRAIN INJURY COALITION

The Pennsylvania Brain Injury Coalition is made up of a group of volunteers that work together with the Brain Injury Legislative Caucuses to address the needs of the individuals in Pennsylvania living with brain injury related issues, at the legislative level.

The priorities for 2023 included:

- Access to post-acute Neurorehabilitation services
- Addressing the impact of the low reimbursement rates on the staffing crisis, which has created an inability to identify appropriate staff for a specialized population and the resulting provider waitlists and delayed consumer access to care.
- Continuing efforts to educate and train healthcare professionals for people who have unintentional opioid overdose resulting in brain injury.
- Ensuring appropriate educational supports for children with brain injury including concussion
- Identify and support other populations where brain injury is over-represented and underserved (for example: homeless, mental health, domestic violence, substance abuse)
- Encouraging additional legislators to join the Brain Injury Legislative Caucuses.
- Working on modifications to expand the scope of the Safety and Youth Sports Act.

RESOURCES

For additional information or inquiries regarding brain injury services in Pennsylvania, please contact or go online at:

- **PA Department of Health Brain Injury Advisory Board**
The Brain Injury Advisory Board meetings are open to the public. If you would be interested in attending a meeting, please call: **1-866-412-4755**
- **PA Department of Health Head Injury Program (HIP)**
Website: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/Pages/Head-Injury.aspx>
Phone: 717-772-2763 (8:30 AM-4 PM)
- **PA Department of Health BrainSTEPS**
Website: <http://www.brainsteps.net>
Phone: (724) 944-6542

- **PA Department of Health NeuroResource Facilitation Program**
Website: <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/programs/Pages/NeuroResource-Facilitation-Program.aspx>
Phone: 717-772-2763 (8:30 AM-4 PM)
- **Brain Injury Help Line**
Phone: 1-866-412-4755
- **Brain Injury Resource Line (BIRL)**
Phone: 1-800-444-6443
- **BIAPA**
Website: www.biapa.org
Phone: 1-866-635-7097
- **Disability Rights Pennsylvania**
Website: www.disabilityrightspa.org
Phone: 1-800-692-7443
- **PA Health Law Project**
Website: www.phlp.org
Phone: 800-274-3258