



ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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Message from the Chairman



John Culver

NCDHH Chairman

In 2025, the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing focused on strengthening its foundation and clarifying its direction. During a year of transition, the Commission remained steady in its commitment to transparency, accountability, and reliable communication access for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans.

The Board adopted a new 5-year Strategic Plan, including updated mission and vision statements, core principles, and six strategic goals to guide the Commission's work. This framework strengthens alignment across programs and keeps our efforts focused on long-term impact.

Throughout the year, NCDHH provided targeted outreach, individualized guidance, and education statewide while placing greater emphasis on evaluating outcomes and collecting meaningful feedback.

The Board continued fulfilling its statutory responsibilities through open meetings and active oversight. In 2025, five new Board Members were appointed, strengthening leadership as we move forward.

Communication access supports all areas of public life across Nebraska. We remain committed to ensuring these systems are dependable and accessible for all.

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I thank our dedicated staff, partners, and community members for their continued commitment to advancing equity statewide.

Strategic Plan 2025-2030

In 2025, NCDHH undertook a comprehensive strategic planning process to modernize its mission, vision, and goals. The resulting 5-year plan clarifies priorities, strengthens accountability, and aligns agency efforts around measurable outcomes.

Vision

“

Access is a foundation in every part of life.

”

Mission

We educate and engage Nebraskans by advancing equity, influencing policy, and ensuring communication access across information, services, and systems is built with and for the community.

Core Principles



Education



Engagement



Equity

Strategic Goals

1

Advance Awareness and Community Leadership

Promote communication access and cultural understanding through accessible education, outreach, and training. Support public learning, Deaf culture education, and community leadership initiatives that build equity.

2

Strengthen Communication Access and Interpreter Standards

Ensure equitable and high-quality communication by maintaining robust interpreter licensing and oversight. Respond to consumer concerns efficiently and support ongoing professional development for interpreters statewide.

3

Influence Policy and Foster System-Level Change

Engage with policymakers and partners to influence legislation, improve public systems, and embed equitable communication practices across state agencies, institutions, and services.

4

Expand Responsive and Innovative Services

Continuously assess community needs and respond with adaptive programs and services. Prioritize innovation, technology, and service equity to meet the evolving needs of Nebraskans.

5

Ensure Accessible Health and Behavioral Care

Partner with behavioral health systems to ensure communication access and culturally and linguistically appropriate services for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing individuals across all regions.

6

Sustain Organizational Integrity and Impact

Ensure the long-term strength of the Commission through transparent governance, effective staffing, responsible resource management, and continuous improvement rooted in community trust and accountability.

Impact Dashboard

2025 reflected a more intentional outreach approach. NCDHH prioritized strengthening core outreach efforts and collecting feedback, focusing on measurable impact rather than high-volume event attendance.

At the same time, regional Outreach Liaisons continued providing one-on-one support, equipment demonstrations, assistance with programs such as NSTEP and HAB, and direct resource guidance to individuals and families statewide.

1,872

Clients
Assisted

657

1-on-1
Service Delivery

119

Presentations/
Trainings

3,010

Presentation
Attendees

567

Outreach
Activities

9,359

Outreach
Contacts

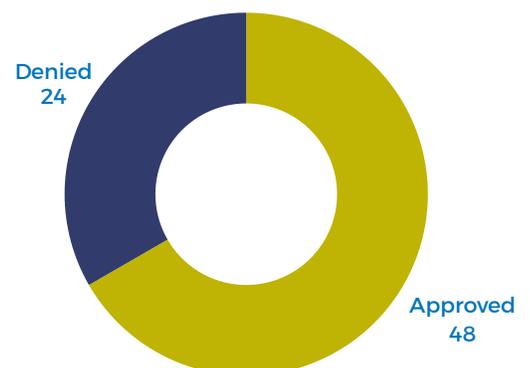
Hearing Aid Banks

From January 1 - June 30, 2025, NCDHH processed applications for the Lions and Sertoma Hearing Aid Banks prior to the transition of program administration on July 1.

Lions



Sertoma



Training Impact Indicators

In 2025, NCDHH delivered 119 presentations and trainings to audiences across Nebraska. Beginning in October, the Commission implemented standardized post-presentation feedback surveys to better measure the impact of its efforts. Between October and December, 77 responses were collected.

Overall Presentation Delivery

4.75



Explained Agency Purpose

4.74



Addressed Questions Effectively

4.78



Helpfulness of Information

4.81



The Net Promoter Score measures how likely participants are to recommend a training or service to others. Scores range from -100 to 100. A score of 67 is considered strong and reflects high satisfaction and confidence in the value of NCDHH's trainings/presentations.

Net Promoter Score (NPS)



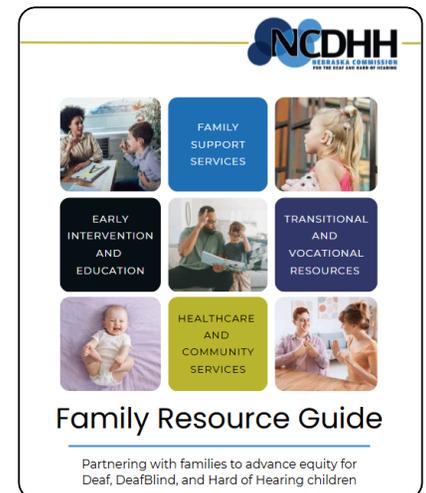
Agency in Action

The following highlights represent measurable progress in 2025. From strengthening language policy and public safety collaboration to expanding family advocacy and community visibility. Together, they reflect a year focused on intentional action and lasting impact.

Education, Youth and Family Advocacy

Family Resource Guide

Families often face confusion when navigating educational, medical, and community support systems; the Family Resource Guide was designed to clarify roles, outline available services, and provide a structured pathway to assistance. By centralizing this information in one accessible resource, NCDHH strengthened coordination between families and service providers and promoted earlier connection to specialized support.



Accessibility in Youth Programming

NCDHH supported families navigating communication barriers in after-school activities and summer programs. By working directly with families and providers to clarify accommodation responsibilities, appropriate supports were secured to ensure meaningful participation. These efforts reduced isolation and strengthened accountability within community youth programming.

Kearney & Grand Island Youth Events

Through partnerships with Nebraska Hands & Voices and local ESUs, NCDHH supported youth-centered community events in Kearney and Grand Island. These gatherings created accessible spaces for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and families while strengthening local partnerships.

Public Safety & Systems Collaboration

Law Enforcement Training

In 2025, NCDHH partnered with the Omaha Police Department to develop mandatory, accessibility-informed training for all OPD officers. NCDHH staff created comprehensive video modules designed to strengthen officers' ability to communicate effectively and safely with Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community members.



As part of this collaboration, NCDHH also designed and produced printed communication cards for officers to use during field interactions. The cards provide visual prompts and practical guidance to support clearer communication in real-time situations.

In addition, NCDHH delivered a presentation on interacting with the Deaf community to the Lincoln Police Department, expanding officer awareness and reinforcing best practices for respectful, accessible engagement.



By embedding communication access into training and equipping officers with practical tools, NCDHH advanced safer interactions and strengthened trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Emergency Preparedness Workshop

NCDHH partnered with the American Red Cross and the Douglas County Health Department to host a free, in-person emergency preparedness workshop designed specifically for the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing. The event strengthened cross-agency collaboration and reinforced NCDHH's leadership in advancing accessible emergency planning across Nebraska.

Language Policy & Standards

Position Statement on ASL Instruction

NCDHH formalized its Position Statement on American Sign Language (ASL) Instruction, reinforcing ASL's integration as a recognized language of instruction and strengthening workforce pathways in education, interpreting, and behavioral health. The statement affirms ASL as a complete, culturally grounded language and ensures instruction supports systemic communication access.

Statewide Interpreter Issues Roundtable

NCDHH hosted a statewide Interpreter Issues Roundtable, bringing together representatives from education, healthcare, judiciary, interpreter professionals, and Deaf community leaders. The discussion addressed interpreter workforce shortages, rural access disparities, mentorship gaps, and licensure pathways, while identifying short- and long-term strategies to strengthen Nebraska's interpreter pipeline. By convening cross-sector leaders around shared challenges, NCDHH positioned itself as a central facilitator in advancing interpreter standards, sustainability, and equitable access statewide.

Community Engagement

Scottsbluff Hearing Loss Support Group

NCDHH continued its monthly hearing loss support group in western Nebraska to foster connection and shared learning. With consistent attendance and rotating guest speakers, the group provides a welcoming space for individuals and families to exchange resources and experiences. The initiative strengthens regional community ties and expands access to local support.





Wayne State College Presentation

At Wayne State College’s Ideas & Healthy Conversations event, NCDHH facilitated a discussion centered on “listening differently in a Deaf world.” Students reflected on how the presentation shifted their understanding of communication and access in everyday spaces, expanding awareness beyond traditional assumptions about hearing and disability.

UNK Disability & Workforce Panel

For the third consecutive year, NCDHH participated in a disability panel at the University of Nebraska Kearney, engaging students pursuing careers in human resources and related fields. The discussion elevated Deaf and Hard of Hearing workplace experiences and strengthened awareness of communication access responsibilities among future employers.

Seeking Opportunities for an Advocacy Revolution (SOAR)

NCDHH was selected to present on “Dinner Table Syndrome” at the SOAR Conference, a regional gathering of disability self-advocates from across the Midwest. The session explored how everyday communication exclusion impacts Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and why intentional access practices matter in family, community, and advocacy spaces. By bringing this conversation into a cross-disability forum, NCDHH broadened understanding of communication equity and strengthened collaboration across advocacy communities.

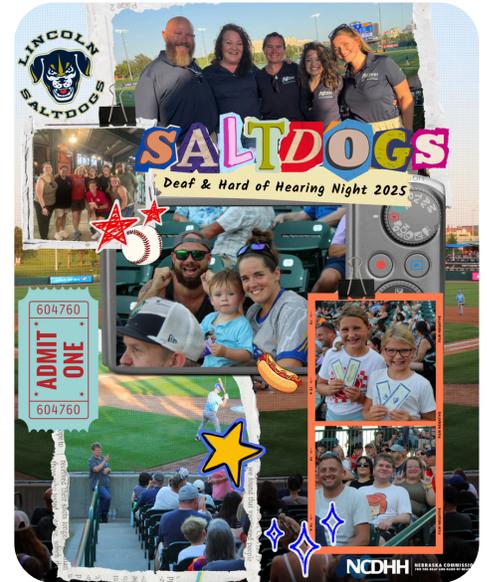
Connection Hour 2025

NCDHH hosted a Connection Hour event to launch the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan and engage community stakeholders in dialogue. With approximately 60 participants joining in person and virtually, attendees were exposed to resources and services many had not previously known were available.



Saltdogs Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Night

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Night at Haymarket Park welcomed approximately 70 attendees from across the region. The evening featured a Deaf educator throwing the ceremonial first pitch, live ASL interpretation, and a silent inning invited fans to experience the game from a Deaf-centered perspective, promoting visibility and equity in a public setting.



International Day of Sign Languages

To celebrate International Day of Sign Languages, NCDHH hosted regional coffee shop gatherings focused on teaching American Sign Language and sharing examples of sign languages used around the world. Participants engaged in hands-on learning and cultural exchange, expanding awareness of linguistic diversity within the Deaf community. The strong enthusiasm and attendance inspired the launch of a new initiative beginning in 2026.

Awareness Day at the Joslyn Art Museum

NCDHH partnered with the Joslyn Art Museum to host a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day and highlight its gold-standard accessibility practices. With full communication access throughout the day, attendees explored exhibits while connecting with community members and partners. The event reinforced the importance of accessible public spaces statewide.



Behavioral Health Advocacy

Nebraska law (LB 25) directs the Commission to assist Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans in accessing comprehensive mental health and substance abuse services through coordination, communication support, and training for providers.

In 2025, NCDHH advanced this mandate through cross-sector collaboration, emergency preparedness advocacy, peer support exploration, and statewide behavioral health partnerships.

Emergency Preparedness & Trauma-Informed Access

The Behavioral Health Liaison participated in regional emergency preparedness coalitions to address both communication access and the mental health impact of natural disasters. Through collaboration with meteorologists, media representatives, public health departments, and emergency management teams, discussions began to advance ASL-accessible emergency alerts and informational videos. This work strengthens crisis response systems while recognizing the trauma-related effects emergencies can have on Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

Substance Use Prevention Collaboration

The Behavioral Health Liaison joined Project Extra Mile, a statewide coalition focused on reducing alcohol use, particularly among youth. Participation ensures Deaf and Hard of Hearing perspectives are represented in prevention initiatives and public health strategies.

Suicide Prevention & Peer Leadership Engagement

Active membership in the Metro Area Suicide Prevention Coalition and the NAMI Nebraska Peer Leadership Council expanded Deaf representation within mental health advocacy spaces. These partnerships strengthen cross-sector awareness and promote more inclusive behavioral health policy and programming statewide.

Interpreter Workforce

2025 Interpreter Workforce Snapshot

109

LICENSED INTERPRETERS

- 68 Nebraska residents
- 41 Out-of-state residents

04

LICENSED INTERMEDIARY INTERPRETERS

04

APPRENTICE LICENSE HOLDERS

17

LICENSED INTERPRETERS AGE 65+

18

LICENSED VIDEO REMOTE INTERPRETING (VRI) COMPANIES

What the Data Shows

As demand for qualified interpreters continues nationwide, Nebraska is intentionally focusing on growing and sustaining interpreter pathways within the state to support long-term communication access. Anticipated retirements and modest pipeline growth highlight the importance of coordinated recruitment, mentorship, and education strategies rooted in Nebraska's communities and institutions.

Interpreter capacity underpins access across education, healthcare, courts, public safety, and behavioral health systems statewide, making in-state workforce development a critical component of long-term accessibility.

2025 Action Steps

As highlighted earlier in the report, NCDHH convened a statewide Interpreter Issues Roundtable, bringing together education leaders, interpreter professionals, healthcare representatives, judiciary partners, and Deaf community stakeholders to examine long-term workforce sustainability.

Priority areas identified include:

- Strengthening Nebraska-based recruitment pathways
- Expanding mentorship and professional development
- Increasing early exposure to interpreting careers
- Exploring policy and funding mechanisms to support workforce growth

NCDHH will continue collaborating with universities, state agencies, and legislative partners to support a sustainable interpreter workforce that meets Nebraska's long-term communication access needs.

Service Model Updates

In 2025, NCDHH implemented updates to its service model to strengthen long-term sustainability and clarify the Commission's role in supporting communication access statewide.

Assistive Devices Loan Program (ADLP)

The ADLP concluded on July 1, 2025. Expanded statewide options now provide more sustainable pathways for accessing assistive communication technology. By shifting away from direct equipment loans, NCDHH is better positioned to focus on education, coordination, and connecting individuals to permanent solutions.

NCDHH staff continue to offer equipment demonstrations, share information about available technology options, and refer individuals to trusted providers for purchasing or accessing equipment.

Hearing Aid Bank (HAB) Application Process

Also effective July 1, 2025, the Nebraska Hearing Aid Banks, located at the Barkley Memorial Center, assumed responsibility for all applications, processing, orders, and communications related to the Sertoma, Lions, and HearU programs.

The Hearing Aid Banks are equipped with infrastructure that allows for more efficient processing, consistent oversight, and improved delivery of services. This transition also enables NCDHH to remain focused on supporting all Nebraskans without being in the position of granting or denying services — a function that does not align directly with the Commission's mission to advance equity and communication access for all.

Regional Office Relocation

In 2025, NCDHH closed its North Platte office and opened a new central region office in Kearney to better align with regional service needs and geographic accessibility. The transition supports more strategic deployment of outreach resources while maintaining statewide coverage.

Commission Governance

NCDHH operates under statutory authority and is guided by appointed commissioners and advisory bodies. In 2025, the Commission experienced both board renewal and executive leadership transition while maintaining continuity of services and strategic direction.



FULL COMMISSION BOARD

NCDHH is governed by a nine-member Board of Commissioners appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature. The Board's structure ensures representation from Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans alongside individuals with knowledge and expertise in hearing differences.

In 2025, the Governor appointed five new members to the Board. The Commission currently has seven active members, with two seats remaining vacant and pending appointment. Filling these remaining positions will ensure full representation and strengthen the Board's ability to provide comprehensive oversight and strategic guidance.

2025 Full Board Members: John Culver (Chairman), Richard McCowin (Vice Chairman), Diane Schutt (Secretary), Dr. Kay Crabtree, Candice Arteaga, Roy Christensen, and Julie Mruz.



INTERPRETER REVIEW BOARD

The Interpreter Review Board (IRB) is responsible for safeguarding the quality and integrity of sign language interpreting services across Nebraska. The IRB enforces regulations that establish minimum competency standards for interpreters working in state-regulated settings.

Through licensure oversight, complaint review, and regulatory guidance, the IRB plays a critical role in ensuring effective communication and protecting the rights of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans.

2025 IRB Members: Meghann Cassidy (Chairperson), Tami Richardson-Nelson (Vice Chairperson), Margie Propp, Shawn Shannon, Briana Stradinger, Vicki Steinhauer-Campbell, Vonda Apking, and Kyle Miers.



MENTAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC) supports the Commission in advancing equitable access to behavioral health and substance use services for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans. By identifying systemic barriers, advising on policy considerations, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration, MHAC helps ensure that communication access is integrated into Nebraska's behavioral health infrastructure.

2025 MHAC Members: Cody McEvoy (Chairman), Scott Loder, Erik Decker, Briana Stradinger, Diedra Shaw, Erika Ziemann, Diane Meyer, Ronda Rankin, Sara Peterson, Paulissa Kipp, Sakura Yodogawa-Campbell.

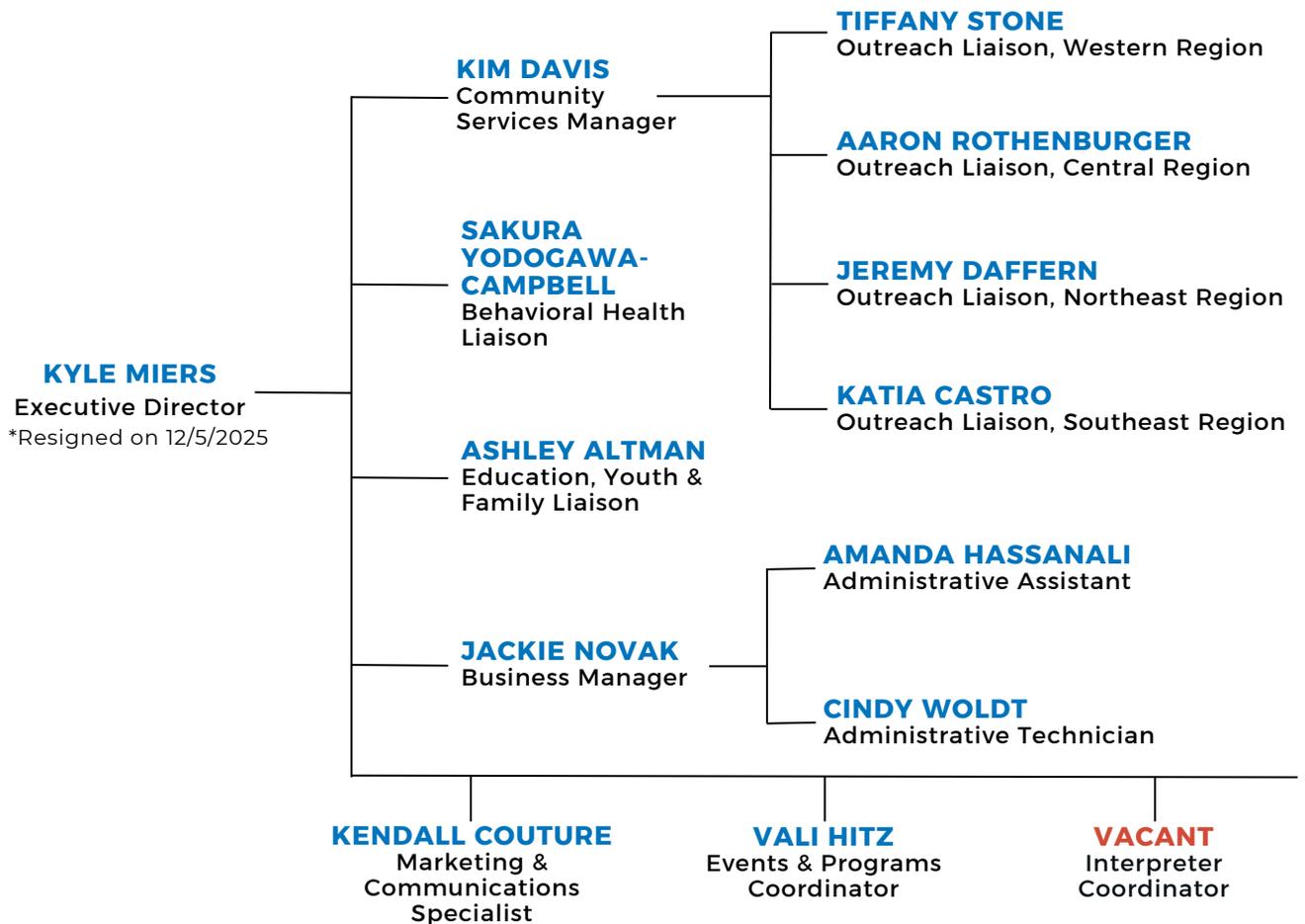


TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Telecommunications Relay Advisory Committee (TRAC) advises the Nebraska Public Service Commission on matters related to the state’s telecommunications relay system and the Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program (NSTEP). Through its representation on TRAC, NCDHH helps ensure that relay services and communication technologies remain accessible, effective, and responsive to the needs of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans.

2025 TRAC Members: Norman Weverka, Robert Feit, Tami Richardson-Nelson, Tim Schram, John Wyvill, Brett Bode (Technical Advisor).

2025 NCDHH Staff Org Chart



Executive Leadership Transition

In December 2025, Kyle Miers resigned from his position as Executive Director.

Following his departure, Community Services Manager, Kim Davis was named Interim Executive Director to ensure continuity of operations and sustained implementation of the Commission's strategic priorities. Under interim leadership, NCDHH maintained service delivery, advanced key initiatives, and continued strengthening internal systems and external partnerships.

The Commission remains committed to stable governance and consistent progress during this leadership transition.

Stay Connected



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Scan to sign up for email updates



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