Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH)

**Mental Health Advisory Committee Meeting**

**Date:** November 18th, 2021  
**Time:** 2pm – 4pm  
**Location:** Omaha State Building, 1313 Farnam ST, Omaha NE 68102, Room 207  
**Interpreters:** Sharon Sinkler and Amber Tucker

**Minutes:** Traci Johns  
**CART:** CART Services of ERI / Margaret “Mydge” Heaney

**Members Present:** Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell, Ms. Tracey Minto, Ms. Kathleen Valle, Ms. Vickie Frizzell Pratt, Ms. Linda Wittmuss

**NCDHH Staff Present:** Mr. John Wyvill, Executive Director; Mr. Cody McEvoy, Behavioral Health Coordinator

**Technical Advisors Present:** Ms. Diane Meyer

**Members Absent:** Mr. Benjamin Clancy

**Technical Advisors Absent:** Ms. Sue Czaplewski

1. **Meeting called to order:**

Ms. Vicki Steinhauer – Campbell called the meeting to order at 2:09 p.m.

Ms. Steinhauer announced the notice of the meeting was duly given, posted, published, and tendered in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, and all board members received notice simultaneously by email. Publication of official notice of the meeting appeared in a legal newspaper of general circulation in this state, as required by the Open Meetings Act.

1. **Approval of the agenda:**

Ms. Kathleen Valle made the motion to accept the agenda. Ms. Vickie Frizzell Pratt seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with all voting aye.

1. **Approval of the prior meeting minutes for August 17th, 2021:**

Ms. Vickie Frizzell Pratt made the motion to accept the minutes as written. Ms. Kathleen Valle seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion carried with all voting aye.

1. **Discussion:**

* Member Committee Updates
  + Mr. McEvoy updated the group that he has had a meeting with Heartland Deaf Advocacy Services to see if they would be interested in providing a technical advisor for the committee. They are a deaf-led agency focusing on domestic violence and advocacy and they seemed to be interested in collaborating.
  + Mr. McEvoy also shared that Vicki Steinhauer-Campbell’s term has lapsed so that if anyone would like to be Chairperson that position is still open.
  + Mr. McEvoy updated the group on the recently held Deaf Interpreter workshop. There were twelve participants and nine took the written test. If they passed the written test they can submit an application, supporting documentation and fee for a Nebraska license. Mr. McEvoy commented that some of the training included the ethics and role information for the interpreter portion of it so if they have a bachelor's they can pursue a certified deaf interpreter at the national level where they would be able to then interpret in surrounding states. NCDHH will also be including more information regarding Deaf Interpreters in future training presentations for those that would benefit like hospitals, businesses, agencies and other organizations.
  + Mr. McEvoy updated the group that he has been learning about the diverse ways that states handle their mental health programs through his participation in the National State Mental Health Directors of the Deaf group. In this group, Mr. McEvoy has also been discussing how to handle lack of accessibility to hotlines established for mental health crisis situations.
  + Mr. McEvoy has had meetings with Alabama’s Director of Deaf Services Steve Hamerdinger from the Alabama Department of Mental Health. Mr. Hamerdinger has a large program for interpreters to specialize in mental health interpreting. There has been a need here in Nebraska for more training for interpreters in mental health. Typically to receive this training they would have to pay to fly to Alabama and stay for a period of time to receive that training which can be expensive. Mr. McEvoy has begun discussions with Mr. Hamerdinger about the possibility of them coming here to Nebraska instead. They also have a program for educational interpreters that might be beneficial.
  + Mr. McEvoy updated the group that he and Jeremy Daffern, NCDHH Advocacy Specialist, held training in Ogallala for 75-100 people from CPS and APS (Child and Adult Protective Services). It went very well and they received positive feedback. The training focused on Deaf Culture training and awareness and special considerations when interacting with someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing and highlighted particular situations that come up when working in CPS or APS situations.
* Updating Behavioral Health Website
  + Mr. McEvoy shared that he has updated all the mental health providers on the website and they now have photographs and bios. Also listed for each provider is accepted insurances which seems to be a barrier for people when looking for services. You can also filter for the type of provider you are looking for. Also updated is the domestic violence/alcohol and substance abuse page. National resources have also been included on the website.

1. **NCDHH Executive Director Report – Mr. Wyvill**

* Mr. Wyvill shared with the group that Peggy Williams has been appointed by the governor to serve on the NCDHH Board. The Board has a meeting in Omaha tomorrow and will be finishing up the strategic planning process.
* There have been several discussions the Omaha Police Department, Project Harmony, HHS , Omaha Public School district and also the Department of Education regarding an incident of the inappropriate, and possibly illegal, usage of an educational interpreter in an abuse allegation case.
* NCDHH has asked for a portion of the Rescue Fund to advocate for broadband access and funds for a mobile app that supplies sign language interpreters on cell phones for deaf consumers. Also asked for is enhanced training for educational interpreters in the school setting along with some funds to be set aside specifically for students for services and support. The third thing asked for was a fund to subsidize the payment of interpreters working in a rural setting.
* Mr. Wyvill shared that the Board has made a change to the NCDHH website to be consistent with other states in the surrounding areas. Referral agencies will be listed on our website with their contact information as well as listing the licensed interpreters without their contact information. This change will alleviate the effort businesses currently are putting into finding an interpreter and will allow the referral agencies to handle that aspect of it instead. NCDHH has received letters from NeAD, OAD, and Heartland Deaf Advocacy Services all in support of that change.

1. **Agency Updates**

**Ms. Vickie Frizzell Pratt**

Ms. Frizzell Pratt reported that she has been very busy and has had to add expanded hours. She highlighted the opiate death epidemic that the United States is experiencing and that she has had patients needing help with that. She also shared that UNO has tenured positions available for a professor and an associate professor in the School of Social Work.

**Ms. Tracey Minto**

Ms. Minto reported that she also is very busy and is completely full until at least 2022. She has had to pass on many referrals and feels that there may not be enough resources available to meet the demand right now.

**Nebraska Regional Program** - **Ms. Diane Meyer**

Ms. Meyer reported that NDE is allowing in-person activities and they have had many events that include the Elementary Extravaganza held at the Omaha Children’s museum, the Nebraska School for the Deaf museum and the Deaf Heritage Cultural Center. Other events were Space Camp for middle school students in Kansas; a Fall outing for 7-12 graders with lots of outdoor activities; and the Battle of the Books competition where two of their teams moved up in the competition. Events coming up are a story-telling festival for K-4 and a cookie decorating contest where many cookies will be donated to the Rainbow House. They also have received permission to go into OPS schools and do activities there. Ms. Meyer highlighted that they are working on educating high school students on how to request an interpreter, what is available for services from the Commission and also on their Civil Rights, ADA rights and what is available in the community for resources.

**CHI Report - Ms. Kathleen Valle**

Ms. Valle reported that CHI has two American Sign Language positions available. One is a part-time evening position that is eligible for benefits and one is a PRN position (call when needed).

Ms. Valle shared that she read a book about Deaf culture and really found it informative and interesting and she is considering sharing it with executive leadership next year during the international translation day. This day, September 30th, is the day where CHI recognizes their foreign language interpreters as well as ASL interpreters each year. Ms. Valle asked the group for any recommendations that would be educational around this topic that she could look into.

**DHHS- Div. of Behavioral Health - Ms. Linda Wittmuss**

Ms. Wittmuss shared that their strategic plan is now on the website and that they are looking for feedback for feasible action steps to take to reach those goals. Particularly she is looking for ideas around how to improve getting the Deaf and Hard of Hearing population mental health services and then the area of how to increase the mental health workforce that know ASL or are familiar with the population and their particular needs.

John Wyvill updated the group that the full board is currently pursuing legislation in response to the chronic ongoing problem of not having appropriate communication access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients admitted into facilities throughout the state. The legislation would require any medical facility to have a written communication plan in the plan of care for any patient admitted into a hospital.

Mr. Wyvill asked Ms. Valle how CHI is handling the nursing shortage. Ms. Valle reported that there was a nursing shortage before the pandemic and that the pandemic has greatly exacerbated the situation here and on a national level. There are talks of reallocation of tasks which would involve having others do tasks that don’t require as high of level of licensure as nursing. They are also trying to build a pipeline that brings more nurses in the future. They are using funds to pay for nursing tuition for those that can’t afford the expense.

Ms. Meyer commented about a past project that did not come to fruition involving using the Iowa School for the Deaf’s housing dorms for a residential treatment program for kids. At the time, the closest treatment program for kids was in Florida. There was a problem with the billing of interpreters at that time but it would be good to look at it again as many things have changed since then.

The group discussed the Counseling Compact which involves allowing counselors to practice telehealth in another state. 10 states have to approve the compact for it to go into effect and currently there are only two states that have approved it.

Mr. Wyvill updated the group about the legislation NCDHH is working on to receive Recuse Funds for providing interpreters in rural settings. He also updated the group on statistics on the Deaf population: approximately 18,000 people in Nebraska are considered deaf and 20% of the population in Nebraska, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed, has some form of hearing loss. 1 out of 3 over the age of 65 has a hearing loss and 1 in 2 over the age of 80 also has hearing loss. Mr. Wyvill also updated the group on the Apprentice License program that was created in 2021.

**Next Meeting Dates / Meeting Time from 2p – 4p:**

* + Next meeting date will be determined through email.

**Meeting Adjournment:**

Ms. Vicki Steinhauer-Campbell adjourned the meeting at 4:00.