

Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC)
111 N. Fifth Street, Suite 100
Minneapolis, MN 55403

5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

A. MDLC'S WORK

In our work, MDLC acknowledges the values within the Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA). Consistent with the MHRA, and with its mission to promote Disability Justice, MDLC recognizes that disability status may intersect with other protected classes. These include a client's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender, marital status, disability, public assistance, age, sexual orientation, and familial status. MDLC is committed to diversity, inclusion, and equity. MDLC also uses MMLA's Racial Justice Values Statement to guide our work. Under this guidance document, MDLC prioritizes cases and issues that seek to advance the cause of racial justice. See <https://mylegalaid.org/news/article/legal-aid-introduces-its-racial-justice-values-statement>.

Within this context, MDLC's advocacy includes:

- providing individual and group legal advocacy for persons with disabilities;
- conducting monitoring visits and investigations to ensure safety and appropriate services;
- providing outreach to individuals with disabilities, their families, their advocates, and their service providers;
- delivering training and information on legal rights and self-advocacy; and
- educating policy makers on issues that affect people with disabilities.

B. STRATEGIC GOALS

To guide its work, MDLC has adopted this Five-Year Strategic Plan that has the following four, broad goals:

1. ELIMINATE ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Consistent with the policy of our federal grants and implementing statutes, MDLC places primary emphasis on protecting persons with disabilities from abuse and neglect. This includes guarding against the following:

- physical abuse;
- neglect of health and safety needs;
- improper use of restraint and seclusion; and
- financial exploitation.

2. INCREASE INTEGRATION & DECREASE DISCRIMINATION

Consistent with the principles underlying Olmstead, MDLC seeks to maximize clients' opportunities to live, work and recreate in inclusive, integrated settings of their choice. MDLC helps clients obtain individualized community-based services and supports in each of the following areas:

- Education;
- Housing;
- Transportation;
- Employment; and
- Other community activities.

MDLC also works to protect clients' civil rights, including voting rights, and to eliminate discrimination in the above areas, as well as in the access to the following:

- Public services (services provided by local, county or state government); and
- Public accommodations (businesses serving the public).

3. INCREASE ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE SERVICES

MDLC recognizes the challenges that people with disabilities can face in accessing necessary and appropriate services. MDLC's advocacy focuses on:

- maximizing clients' choice among appropriate services and supports;
- increasing opportunities for clients to self-direct their services and supports;
- improving provider capacity to meet clients' needs; and
- maintaining and increasing funding available to meet clients' services and support needs.

MDLC helps persons with disabilities access and maintain services and supports in each of the following areas:

- Education;
- Housing;
- Transportation;
- Employment;
- Other community activities; and
- Health care.

4. INCREASE STATEWIDE AWARENESS OF MDLC AS AN ADVOCACY RESOURCE

MDLC strives to provide quality advocacy services to persons with disabilities across the state of Minnesota. To fulfill its mission, MDLC endeavors to increase its visibility in the community and awareness of its work by:

- Conducting outreach to all stakeholder groups - persons with disabilities, their families and friends, service providers, and policymakers; and
- Conducting targeted in-reach to historically underserved communities.

C. STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

To effectively target resources to the issues that matter most to persons with disabilities in Minnesota, MDLC has adopted the following process to review its work, gather stakeholder input, and modify its priorities as needed on an annual basis.

1. Gather and review information regarding disability-related advocacy needs from both internal and external sources, which may include:
 - Survey results;
 - MDLC work teams;
 - Key government and other organizational reports;
 - Focus group members and interviewees;
 - Court decisions and trends; and
 - Disability-related listservs.
2. Identify drivers of change that impact on client needs and rights.
3. Modify, with public input, MDLC’S annual Statement of Goals and Priorities.

This review of data and input resulted in the identification of the key issues and trends that will impact the needs and rights of MDLC’s client communities and our services over the next five years. The following chart summarizes these drivers of change and their correspondence to MDLC’s four strategic goals.

Drivers	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
Sheltered workshops are moving towards less segregation and higher wages		x	x	x
Changing societal expectations of transition-aged youth to be more integrated		x	x	
Insufficient focus on person-centered planning about work		x	x	x
Systemic racism/ableism in disability service systems and significant barriers for BIPOC/culturally diverse workers		x	x	x
More people are returning to work after the COVID-19 pandemic, which is raising demand for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and higher expectations for competitive, integrated employment.		x	x	x
More information on reasonable accommodations as they are returning to work after the pandemic				x
Individuals with disabilities voting at a lower rates than voters without disabilities.		x		x
Barriers to fully accessible absentee voting		x		
Distrust and misinformation during elections, which has led some states to enact laws making it more difficult to vote.		x		x
Racial Disparities in Restraint, Seclusion, Police Referral, and Discipline encountered by students with disabilities	x			x

Covid-19 Recovery special education service implementation issues				X
Lack of preventative approaches and services in schools	X			X
More school discipline actions for social media and off school conduct		X	X	X
Significant rates of school referrals to the police and other school efforts that result in students entering the school to prison pipeline		X	X	X
Increasing rates of financial fraud and abuse of vulnerable populations	X			X
Increased numbers of SSDI and SSI recipients in need of Representative Payee services for benefits				X
Increased intersectionality of Representative Payees and Guardians for persons with disabilities can be limiting self determination and autonomy	X	X		X
Emerging from the pandemic there are new models of service (more remote assessments, services, telehealth), new communication processes (e.g. Zoom) and technology that may pose access barriers; and new short term money for HCBS, housing, etc.		X	X	X
Possible new HCBS entitlement benefit in proposed federal legislative changes to Medicaid		X	X	
Waiver Reimagine changes including Implementing issues from Phase 1 and Development/implementation of Phase 2		X	X	X
Criminal justice and police reform efforts are advancing and must include impact on persons who have disabilities	X	X	X	X
Potential new Supreme Court decisions on standing, private causes of action/enforceability, and scope of protected classes may affect the legal rights of our clients.		X	X	
Impact of other justice work on persons who have disabilities; intersectionality				X
Positive changes to state human rights laws on requirements for the interactive process and anti-discrimination and reasonable accommodations related to organ transplants		X	X	X
Implementation of new Assisted Living Licensure statute and related changes to residential service options (no more housing with services registration, limitations on customized living)	X	X	X	X
Policy changes in legislation requiring more robust informed choice and decision-making practices		X	X	X
Covid-19 related increases in mental health diagnosis and Covid “long haulers” presenting new challenges to our health care system		X	X	
Supported decision making trends		X	X	X

Strategic Goals:

1. Eliminate Abuse and Neglect
2. Increase Integration and Decrease Discrimination
3. Increase Access to Appropriate Services
4. Increase Statewide Awareness of MDLC as an Advocacy Resource