The 2015 Montana Legislative Session is scheduled to kick off on Jan. 5 and with the new session comes the opportunity for Montana's Centers for Independent Living to work toward building a brighter future for all Montanans with disabilities.

During this Legislative session, Joel Peden will once again be working in Helena as the statewide lobbyist for the Montana Centers for Independent Living. This session looks to be a busy one as we strive to maintain the successes we achieved during the 2013 session and build upon those successes to ensure that the services offered by the State of Montana adequately meet the needs of Montanans with disabilities.

Montana's Centers for Independent Living have been working tirelessly over the past two years collecting information from people with disabilities all across the state and using that information to develop policy priorities for this Legislative Session. You can read our legislative priorities on page 2.

Be assured, we will do everything within our power to improve services and ensure that the voices of Montanans with disabilities is heard, but we cannot do this alone.

We ask that you join with us to let your voices be heard about the importance of services you received and what the impact would be if you were to lose them.

There will be numerous opportunities for you to contact legislators in regards to various bills and funding decisions that they will be voting on. Please join our Montana Independent Living Action Alert Listserv to get involved!

Montana Independent Living Action Alert Listserv

If you are interested in following our work at the session and learning of opportunities to contact legislators when important issues arise, please subscribe to the Montana Independent Living Action Alert email listerv by sending an email to montana-il-action-alert+subscribe@googlegroups.com.

You can also follow action alerts on Twitter by following @SummitILC or on our website at http://www.summitilc.org/actionalert.html.
UPCOMING EVENTS

FLATHEAD COUNTY

Social Security Orientation - First Friday monthly, 9 a.m. and third Friday monthly, 1 p.m.
Women’s Discussion Group - Second and fourth Fridays monthly, 1-3 p.m.
Sign Language Class - New classes start every few months.
Social Activities - We get together four times a year for social activities.
   Call the office to put your name on the mailing list so you won’t miss the next fun and exciting adventure!

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at:

Gateway Community Center, United Way Conference Room
1203 Hwy 2 West, Kalispell

Call Flo or Dianna, (406) 257-0048, for more information or to register.

RAVALLI COUNTY

Man Cave - Fourth Thursday in Jan., Feb., March
People First - Tuesdays, 3-4 p.m.
Women on the Move - Not scheduled yet, TBA
TGIAF - Thank Goodness It’s Activity Friday - Fridays, 1-3 p.m. (No meeting Jan. 2)
Hamilton High School YODA - TBA

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at:

Human Resources Council Building, Summit Conference Room
316 N 3rd St., Hamilton

Call Joel or Mary, (406) 363-5242, for more information or to register.

2015 SOCIAL SECURITY COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENTS

Social Security (Retirement and Disability):
   Starting January 2015
   1.7 percent increase

Medicare Part B Monthly Premium:
   No change from 2014 - $104.90

Supplemental Security Income (SSI):
   Starting Dec. 31, 2014
   Individual - $733
   Couple - $1,100

Substantial Gainful Activity Guidelines:
   Blind - $1,820
   Non-blind - $1,090

Trial Work Period Threshold:
   $780

For more information on Medicare changes:
www.medicare.gov

For more information on adjustments:
www.socialsecurity.gov/cola

To check or create your online Social Security account:
www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount
Montana Centers for Independent Living
2015 Legislative Priorities

- Establish a grant-based funding program to increase playground accessibility statewide so children with and without disabilities may play together in an inclusive environment.

- Establish ongoing funding for the Montana Youth Transitions Project Funding to improve transition outcomes for youth leaving high school and entering adulthood.

- Increase funding for the Montana Youth Leadership Forum to better cultivate leadership, citizenship, and social skills among youth with disabilities so they have the tools to lead successful lives.

- Rebase the Senior and Long-Term Care Home and Community-Based Waiver program budget so all waiver slots are fully funded.

- Increase the Medically Needy Medicaid spend down threshold to make it more equitable for SSDI recipients to qualify for Medicaid.

- Increase funding to Montana's four Centers for Independent Living in order to meet the growing demand for independent living services.

- Continue funding for the Money Follows the Person Housing Bridge program to ensure successful transitions of people living in institutions into the community.

In addition to the priorities listed above, we will also be following the budget bill (HB 2) very closely as well as watching for other legislation that may impact the lives of Montanans with disabilities. To follow our legislative progress, please visit [http://www.summitilc.org/mtcil.html](http://www.summitilc.org/mtcil.html).

Montana Centers for Independent Living New Logo

Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow, Montana Independent Living Project, North Central Independent Living Services, and Summit Independent Living Center work together on state and national issues under the title Montana Centers for Independent Living. We use this collective title to show our solidarity in working together to improve the independence of all Montanans with disabilities.

Montana Centers for Independent Living serve as a strong voice on a wide range of national, state and local issues and work to assure physical, attitudinal, and programmatic access to housing, employment, transportation, communities, recreation, and health and social services.

The Montana Centers for Independent Living recently took on a new look with the redesign by Tyler Stosich with C3 Graphics.
Summit Closed - Dec. 25-26, Jan. 1, Jan. 19, Feb. 16
Summit Orientation - Jan. 9, Feb. 6, Mar. 6, 10-11 a.m.; Jan. 23, Feb. 20, Mar. 20, 1-2 p.m.
Benefits Orientation - Jan. 9, Feb. 6, Mar. 6, 11 a.m.-12 p.m.
People First - First and Third Wednesdays monthly, 4-5 p.m.
Alzheimer’s Support Group - Second Wednesday monthly, 12-2 p.m.
Arthritis Support Group - First Thursday monthly, 12-1 p.m. (No meeting Jan. 1)
Blind Low Vision Support Group - Second Tuesday monthly, 1-2:30 p.m.
Epilepsy Support Group - First Monday monthly, 2-3:30 p.m.
ARIELS (Girl’s Youth Group) - First Friday monthly, 3:30-6 p.m. (Usually meets outside Summit)
Video Game Night - Second and fourth Thursdays monthly, 3-6 p.m.
Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy (YODA) - Fourth Wednesday monthly, 3:30-6 p.m.
Art Group - Second and fourth Fridays monthly, 2-4 p.m.
Living Well Class - Mondays, Jan. 5 - Mar. 30, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
Working Well Class - Tuesdays, Jan. 6 - Feb. 24, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
Wellness Recovery Action Plan - Thursdays, Feb. 5 - Apr. 9, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.
Growing Through Pain & Progressive Loss - Mondays, Feb. 2 - Mar. 16, 1-3 p.m.

Unless otherwise noted, classes and groups meet at:
Summit ILC, Summit’s Conference Room
700 SW Higgins, Suite 101, Missoula

Call Kathy, (406) 728-1630, for more information or to register.

CareerACCESS Independence Through Employment

CareerACCESS is a community-driven, proposed program of reforms to the Social Security Administration’s Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI). It would provide an alternative benefits program for young adults with disabilities, ages 18-30.

This program would be piloted in 5 states with services and supports to propel youth into careers, enable them to build assets, and allow them to keep their disability benefits while building their careers. The program will be driven by an individual career plan including: coaching, counseling and employment support service. The goal is independence through employment.

Learn more about CareerACCESS at www.ourcareeraccess.org
When to Shift: A Discussion of Mobility Devices

For people with mobility-related disabilities, choosing which mobility aid to use, or even having one at all, is a complex and personal decision. I use a walker, along with a recumbent bicycle, to get around.

I discussed this issue with various colleagues who also use mobility devices. One colleague recently transitioned to using a power wheelchair from a manual chair.

He said he changed to using the power chair after having some seating issues with the manual, and, in doing so, he noticed some pros and cons. He has more energy when using the power chair because he doesn’t have to propel himself, but he has noticed his arms becoming weaker and that he has gained weight. He said if there were better seating options available, he would continue using the manual chair instead.

Personally, although I have sometimes have balance problems, I choose to use my walker instead of a manual wheelchair. I do strength and stretching exercises to work on my balance. I prefer to use the walker because, although it’s more physically demanding, I keep muscles in shape that I wouldn’t be using in a manual chair.

My mother walked for many years with a cane. When she moved to a new home with a wheelchair-friendly environment, she transitioned to using a manual wheelchair—and never walked again. Her muscles atrophied and she lost too much coordination. I want to retain my walking ability as long as possible.

There is a time for many people when using a more accommodating mobility aid may be necessary. I personally recommend using the device that engages as many muscles as possible as long as possible—use it or lose it.

Tom H Thompson is a peer advocate in Missoula and can be reached at tomskilaw@gmail.com
In February 2012, Missoula County became the first county in Montana to provide Smart911, a free service focused on optimizing emergency response for you and your family. It allows you to create a Safety Profile that contains valuable “critical care” information. This information is intended to help emergency responders tailor their response to meet your family’s unique needs. Your Safety Profile automatically pops up on the dispatcher’s computer screen when you call 9-1-1 from a phone registered with Smart911. Relevant and potentially lifesaving information is then relayed to emergency responders in the field.

With Smart911, you control the information that you share in your Safety Profile. In your Safety Profile it’s a good idea to include information such as: allergies to medications, medical conditions, and locations of shutoffs for your home utilities. In addition to this, you can upload pictures of your family for an accelerated response in AMBER alert situations. You could also include security gate access codes, pet information and other information that will aid emergency responders. This information is 100% private and is only viewable when you or your family members dial 9-1-1 from a registered phone.

Smart911 also allows you to sign up to receive emergency notifications via your choice of text, phone and/or email messages. Emergency notifications are critical alerts with timely, accurate and actionable information. Lastly, you may opt to share your information with Missoula County Emergency Management officials. Critical care information helps to strengthen plans for responding to and recovering from natural disasters or other emergencies. It may be used to identify those that require extra help during an evacuation or determine the type and quantity of supplies that should be kept on-hand.

The Smart911 is designed to save lives and all Missoula County emergency responders recommend creating a Safety Profile. Please visit www.smart911.com to learn more and create your personal Safety Profile now. Registration is easy and fast. When every second counts, Smart911 helps emergency first responders when you and your family need it most.

Visitability Standards in Missoula City Limits

All new single-family homes, duplexes and triplexes constructed with all of the following visitability features shall be fast-tracked through plan review and permitting and receive a Visitability Certificate.

The following main floor features are required for a Visitable home:

- At least one main floor zero-step entrance via visitable route.
- All Doors/Openings with minimum clear width of 32 inches.
- Bathroom/Half Bath with clear floor space of 30 x 48 inches.
- Bathroom/Half Bath Walls with reinforcing/backing to allow for future installation of grab bars.
- Wall Electrical Outlets at least 15 inches above the finished floor.
- Light Switches, Thermostats and Controls placed 48 inches or lower above the finished floor.

When seeking fast-track review and permitting, submit the Standard Residential Site Plan Check List, and a Visitability Checklist, available at: www.ci.missoula.mt.us/1716/Visitability-Program

Building Officials will authorize fast-tracking and permits shall be issued upon completion of plan review.

View our Visitability Video on YouTube! http://bit.ly/1vMxuy5
The Poverello Center, Inc. has opened a new, rightsized emergency shelter at 1110 West Broadway that offers services to people experiencing homelessness and poverty in Missoula and surrounding areas.

The new facility is ADA accessible, with 115 beds. The Poverello Center’s emergency soup kitchen continues to offer three meals a day, sack lunches for clients needing food to take to work, and a food pantry for those housed but precariously making rent.

The Homeless Outreach Program continues to extend its services to men, women, and youth on the streets, offering basic necessities such as food and blankets, while building relationships to aid people in accessing social services in the local area. The Homeless Outreach Program also builds relationships with community partners and neighbors, doing outreach on the streets daily and responding to a non-emergency hotline, 493-7955.

The Housing Montana Heroes Program helps guide men and women veterans, housed in semi-private rooms within the emergency shelter. The Housing Montana Heroes Program offers case management to veterans for up to 24 months as they access social services in the community and skill-building and other services within the Poverello Center.

Please contact Tessa Heuermann at tessah@montana.com with any questions.
You are invited to the first 2015 event celebrating the ADA’s 25th Anniversary:

**Big Sky Documentary Film Festival**
Theme strands on people with disabilities & veterans of the Vietnam War

**February 6 - 16**
Missoula - Crystal Theatre, Wilma Theatre and the Top Hat Lounge

Watch Summit’s Facebook page for more details!
http://www.facebook.com/SummitILC

Remember, you can always sign up for the electronic newsletter by contacting: missoula@summitilc.org