

History Note: Gov. Wendell Anderson a leader in council's start

by [Access Press Staff](#) // June 10th, 2016



The following is excerpted from The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities series, Forty-Five Years of History 1971-2016. This month looks at the start of Minnesota's council.

The state councils on developmental disabilities are self-governing organizations charged with identifying the most pressing needs of people with developmental disabilities in a specific state or territory. The Minnesota Council is one of 56 councils across the United States and in the nation's territories.

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 1963 and the 1970 Public Law 91-517, the Developmental Disabilities Services and Facilities Construction Act, shaped the councils. The 1970 legislation was to assist and fund states "in developing a plan for the provision of comprehensive services to persons affected by...developmental disabilities" with a focus on deinstitutionalization and developing alternative housing in communities as a priority. Federal money was available to implement state plans.

Guidelines were given for states to establish planning councils to develop strategies and advise governors on services to improve the quality of life for persons with developmental disabilities. Throughout the process, the importance of individual rights and dignity was emphasized.

Councils were to organize and coordinate the services offered by existing agencies and other sources and provide grant monies to secure services and fund new initiatives and construction of facilities. Evaluation of all the activities and projects undertaken by each council is an essential part of federal law putting councils in place.

In Minnesota Gov. Wendell Anderson began the work that ultimately led to establishing the Governor's Planning and Advisory Council on Developmental Disabilities. He appointed W. Dennis Pederson to serve as project director and handle the implementation of the requirements of the law. An Ad Hoc Committee on Developmental Disabilities was formed to work on the state plan submitted to the federal government by the April 15, 1971 deadline.

Once the plan was approved, a permanent council formed in October 1971 with Jane Belau of Rochester as its first leader.

Developing Minnesota's state plan required an understanding of what was needed to accomplish the council's goals, examining the present status and availability of services and supports, and recognizing the network of council partners and initiatives being proposed. Council members also had to learn and understand the history of everything that had happened to Minnesotans with developmental disabilities. An overview of legislation enacted and programs recommended in Minnesota since 1851 is contained in the January 1969 publication, [MN MH-MR Program in Perspective](#).

The new Minnesota council was given \$184,000 in federal funds for its work. Anderson and the council began looking at closing institutions as well as the way to provide grants, services, programs, and facilities. Anderson's correspondence in the state archives shows how deeply involved he and his staff were with the planning and operations of the Developmental Disabilities Council in its formative years. Letters were sent out under his signature to reply to the concerns and questions of not only the interested groups that were participating in the work but also to the relatives and friends of individuals with developmental disabilities who were being impacted by the council's work.

Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota's disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of disability topics, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota. Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions. The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, www.mnddc.org or www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com.