

## In This Issue:

Federal Health Care Legislation Introduced .....	1
Fall Conference.....	1
Preventing Secondary Conditions .....	2
What is a Secondary Condition.....	2
Resources: Diabetes Prevention and Management.....	2
Want to Learn More About Osteoporosis Risks in Persons with Developmental Disabilities? .....	3
Preventive Health Diets.....	3
The Developmental Disabilities Health Alliance, Inc. ....	3

**Health Access for Women with Disabilities**  
*Volume 6, Number 1, October 2007*



# Health Access *for Women with Disabilities*

A publication of the NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities

## Federal Health Care Legislation Introduced

On March 29, 2007 Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) introduced bill S. 1050, "Promoting Wellness for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2007", to establish accessibility standards for medical diagnostic equipment and create wellness grants to fund health programs that focus on the unique challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

"We must recognize the unique situation of individuals with disabilities and work to make certain they are not limited in their access to quality medical care, or in their opportunities for health and wellness," Harkin said. "We want to set

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*- Senator Tom Harkin*

*continues on page 4*

## Fall Conference: *October 20, 2007*

**"Fit & Fabulous at Any Age"** is the theme of Garden State Woman Magazine's 3rd Annual Health & Wellness Conference and Networking. This year, it will be held on Saturday, October 20, 2007, at the new Conference Center at Montclair State University. Speakers for the event include International Health Care Policy Advocate and former Miss America, Nicole Johnson; Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Dr. Fred M. Jacobs; Co-Founder and Executive Director of Medical Missions for Children, Peg Brady; and Cancer Survivor, Ernestine Schlant Bradley.

Registration fee is \$25.00, which includes a healthy continental breakfast and lunch. Garden State Woman subscribers attend without charge. Register at [www.gswoman.com](http://www.gswoman.com), or phone 908-879-7143.

## Preventing Secondary Conditions

by Maryann B. Hunsberger

Women with disabilities often develop secondary conditions. Monique Simmons-Romano, a family nurse practitioner at the Developmental Disabilities Health Alliance, Inc. (DDHA) in Hamilton, advises us on what women can do to prevent or lessen these conditions.

According to Simmons-Romano, women who take psychiatric medications or who use wheelchairs are at increased risk for obesity, which can lead to high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes. A healthy diet helps prevent or lessen these conditions. "Meals should consist of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein, such as a skinless chicken breast."

Wheelchair users are also at risk for osteoporosis. "Weight-bearing exercise helps prevent or lessen this. If a woman can stand sometimes, it helps. Lifting weights helps reduce fractures in the wrists and forearms."

Early bone density screenings aid in prevention. "We screen wheelchair users early for osteoporosis and make sure that the diet has enough calcium. Sunlight or vitamin D supplements help absorb calcium." For maximum absorption, women should take calcium a few hours apart from antacids.

To prevent or control high blood pressure, a low-sodium diet is important, so women should avoid using salt. "When using canned foods, drain off any fluid and rinse the food in cold water before cooking. This eliminates much of the sodium."

Women with cerebral palsy and Down syndrome have an increased epilepsy risk. Some women experience amenorrhea (absence of menstruation) due to epilepsy medication, cerebral palsy or psychiatric medication. Since missing a period for three months or longer increases osteoporosis risk, DDHA sometimes corrects this with birth control pills.

Certain antipsychotic medications (often used to treat women with mental retardation or psychiatric disorders) can also cause diabetes. "A good behavior modification plan can sometimes take care of aggressive behaviors. If women need medication, we look at family history. If a woman has a family history of diabetes, we will use a different medicine that lessens the risk."

## What is a Secondary Condition?

In Healthy People 2010, Chapter 6, secondary conditions are defined as "medical, social, emotional, family, or community problems that a person with a primary disabling condition likely experiences".

Medical secondary conditions common across disability groups include:

- pain
- fatigue
- pressure sores
- fractures
- urinary incontinence
- dental conditions
- obesity
- hypertension
- coronary artery disease
- diabetes
- increased balance & mobility limitations

## Resources: Diabetes Prevention and Management

The Arc of New Jersey has published two comprehensive, easy-to-understand guides on Diabetes Prevention and Management in Individual with Developmental Disabilities. One is a booklet for self-advocates; the other is a guide for caregivers.

The Arc also completed a film version of the information presented in the booklets, available in DVD and VHS formats.

The booklets and the film are free of charge. Contact Diane Flynn at 732-246-2525, ext 28 or email [dflynn@arcnj.org](mailto:dflynn@arcnj.org).

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## Want to learn more about osteoporosis risk in persons with disabilities?

Check out this column written for The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability. The author is Dr. Jennifer Rowland, of the Institute on Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Go to [www.ncpad.org/yourwrites](http://www.ncpad.org/yourwrites) then scroll down and click on "Focus on Secondary Condition Presentation: Osteoporosis Risk and Low Bone Mineral Density in People with Developmental Disabilities."

Another reliable source on osteoporosis can be found on pages 25–26 in "A Provider's Guide for the Care of Women with Physical Disabilities and Chronic Health Conditions" by Suzanne C. Smeltzer, RN, EdD, FAAN and Nancy C. Sharts-Hopko, RN, PhD, FAAN. It may be viewed or downloaded at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/pdfs/providersguide.pdf](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh/pdfs/providersguide.pdf)

## Preventive Health Diet

by Maryann B. Hunsberger

Monique Simmons-Romano recommends a healthy diet to help prevent osteoporosis, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. She gives these tips:

- ☞ Watch serving sizes! "Serving sizes are usually one-half cup, so don't eat more than one actual serving of potatoes or pasta or one slice of bread. A serving size of salad dressing is two tablespoons. Look to see how much is in a serving and how many servings are in the package."
- ☞ Sweets should be in moderation! "Drink only one 12-ounce can of soda each day. Drink water the rest of the day."
- ☞ Eat calcium-rich low fat or fat free dairy products. "If food allergies prevent using dairy, eat dark leafy greens or take calcium supplements."
- ☞ Fruits and vegetables should make up half of each meal. "Frozen and rinsed, canned vegetables are okay to use, although fresh is best."
- ☞ Have less than 2,000 mg of sodium each day. "Watch canned soups. One can has the maximum amount of sodium for the whole day. Also, use oil and vinegar or low-sodium salad dressings."

## The Developmental Disabilities Health Alliance, Inc.

by Maryann B. Hunsberger

The Developmental Disabilities Health Alliance, Inc. has been addressing physical and mental health care needs of people with developmental disabilities since 1997. They have locations in Bloomfield, Hackensack, Hamilton and Clementon for women living in each of the four DDD regions.

At each location, patients can obtain primary care, mental health services, seizure management, case management, behavioral consultation, family support and managed care services. Patients can obtain dietary counseling, gynecological exams, immunizations, physical exams, patient education and referrals to specialists through DDHA. Their web site is [www.ddha.com](http://www.ddha.com)

## Federal Health Care Legislation Introduced *continued from cover*

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standards, ensure proper funding, and make certain that medical professionals receive the appropriate training so that they can provide the best quality care for all.”

The legislation also would require medical and dental schools, along with their residency programs, to provide more training to improve competency and clinical skills in caring for patients with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities.

The wellness grant program would fund programs for smoking cessation, weight control, nutrition and fitness tailored to people with disabilities; preventative health screening programs; and athletic or sports programs that give people with disabilities an opportunity to increase their physical activity.

Companion Bill, H.R. 3294 was introduced by Rep. Nita Lowey, on August 1, 2007, and referred to House committees.

For full text of the legislation, visit <http://thomas.loc.gov> and search by bill number for S 1050 or HR 3294.

**Health Access**  
*for Women with Disabilities*

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**Health Access for  
Women with Disabilities**  
was created by The New Jersey  
Women with Disabilities Health  
Care Task Force.  
Holly Wetscher, Chair  
Norman Reim, Executive Editor

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