



# BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF MONTANA

PREVENTION  EDUCATION  ADVOCACY  
1280 SOUTH 3<sup>RD</sup> STREET WEST  SUITE 4  MISSOULA, MONTANA 59801  
(406) 541-6442  (406) 541-6443  (800) 241-6442  Fax (406) 541-4360  
[www.biamt.org](http://www.biamt.org)  [biam@biamt.org](mailto:biam@biamt.org)

EXHIBIT 17  
DATE 1/25/2011  
HB

January 25, 2011

Joint Appropriations Subcommittee for Health and Human Services

Dear Chairman Roberts and Members of the Committee,

Seven years ago, families of traumatic brain injury survivors asked DPHHS to partner with their association, the BIAMT, to obtain a federal grant in order to develop a way to support survivors and families in the months and years after a brain injury.

The result of that effort was the Resource Facilitation Service, recently renamed the Brain Injury Help Line. It is over four years old and has served almost 900 survivors.

The Help Line is a telephone and computer-based self-advocacy support service that reaches out to enrollees at scheduled times during the two year period immediately after an injury, and also supports survivors at any other time of their lives with the challenges of living with brain injury are making it difficult to cope, to achieve goals or to solve a problem.

Attached is a more complete description of what the Help Line does. What we want to emphasize is that the Help Line is based on a model of self-advocacy support and education developed in Minnesota, where it was shown to reduce disability and dependence on public assistance programs while improving employment outcomes, school performance and family unity.

We are writing today to ask for an appropriation of \$100,000 per year for the 2013 biennium. This may seem like spectacularly bad timing, but in fact, the Help Line received its first one-time \$100,000 appropriation for the 2009 fiscal year, and one time appropriations in the same amount for the 2010 and 2011 fiscal years. The Senior and Long Term Care Division recommended including Help Line funding in the Governor's budget proposal. We appreciate why the Help Line did not make the final cut.

The Brain Injury Association's fundraising activities raise about \$25,000 per year to supplement state funding. We train and employ graduate level practicum students to help staff the Help Line, and work study students to answer phones and help with our mailings. We have obtained grants to help fund the constant hospital outreach and training that is necessary to maintain and increase hospital referrals to the Help Line. Support group volunteers help in the office and at fundraising events. Every year the BIAMT puts on brain injury conferences and trainings.

We have begun to work with the Traumatic Brain Injury Center, a new leadership group of brain injury professionals and organizations, to conduct fundraising activities and to develop brain injury education programs for the community.

In other words, we know how to stretch the state dollar. But we also cannot sustain this free, statewide service without the support of our partner, the state of Montana. Please help the BIAMT to preserve this valuable state resource that has potential to do so much to lessen the disability caused by brain injury.

Respectfully yours,  
The Board of Directors, Brain Injury Association of Montana

Bobbi Perkins, Chair, Helena  
Leif Griffin, Missoula  
Pamela Meck, Missoula  
Sanya Ness, White Hall  
Anita Roessmann, Helena  
Mark Sanders, Great Falls  
Kathy Smith, Great Falls  
Brenda Toner, Missoula  
Randy Wood, Missoula

## ***Montana's Brain Injury Help Line***

***Support and education for people living with a brain injury and their families***

The Brain Injury Help Line is free public health service for people who have just received traumatic brain injuries, as well as for more than 10,000 Montanans already living with traumatic brain injury. The Help Line provides information and support to people with brain injuries during the critical months immediately after the brain injury, when services are critical to help the brain recover; and Help Line helps people cope with the impacts of brain injury on themselves, their jobs and their families. The Help Line does not provide case management, but it supports survivors and their families solve the puzzle of living with brain injury.

### **How it works**

If a brain injury survivor decides to participate in the service, help line staff will call within six weeks after discharge from the hospital, and then again at six, 12, 18 and 24 months. Help Line staff provides information about brain injury diagnosis and recovery, help identify and troubleshoot problems, connect people with community resources, and educate family members, employers and educators about what it means to live with brain injury.

The person with the brain injury, or parent or family member, can opt out of the program at any time, or they can extend the program after two years if there is an ongoing need for service.

Anyone living with a brain injury, or a family member who is assisting, can also enroll in the Brain Injury Help Line by calling 800-241-6442, or 541-6442 in Missoula.

After every contact, staff follows up with a written letter and additional information. Additional follow-up calls are scheduled as necessary to support the efforts of the survivor or family member to solve a problem.

The Brain Injury Help Line also regularly visits hospitals to educate them about the importance of giving patients the opportunity to sign a release so that they can be enrolled in the Help Line and provides hospitals with information to share with patients before discharge.

The Help Line also enrolls any survivors or caregivers who call to ask for help with a new challenge at any time in their lives. Staff ask questions, help develop a plan, send letters and other information, and schedule follow up calls.

### **Why it is important**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that at least 10,000 Montanans currently have a long-term or lifelong need for help to perform activities of daily living as a result of a TBI.

According to one study, about 40% of those hospitalized with a TBI had at least one unmet need for services one year after their injury. The most frequent unmet needs were:

- Improving memory and problem solving;
- Managing stress and emotional upsets;
- Controlling one's temper; and
- Improving one's job skills

TBI can cause a wide range of functional changes affecting thinking, language, learning, emotions, behavior, and sensation. It can also cause epilepsy and increase the risk for conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and other brain disorders that become more prevalent with age.

Without the Help Line, survivors and family may spend months without the information they need to make decisions and seek services. The lost time can have devastating effects on recovery, family dynamics, and family finances. The Help Line is the only resource of its kind in Montana, and it is available free of charge for everyone who needs it, for as long as they need it.

The Resource Facilitation Project in Minnesota, upon which Montana's Help Line is based, documented these results for resource facilitation:

- A rate of return to work at twice the national average;
- An increased likelihood that children receive appropriate educational supports;
- Increased family support and understanding and decreased family crisis;
- Reduced long-term dependence on public assistance;
- A reduced risk of institutionalization.