



State Plan for Brain Injury

2026 – 2029

Acknowledgements

The State Plan for Brain Injury was collaboratively produced by the Iowa Advisory Committee on Brain Injuries. We extend our appreciation to the individuals with lived experience, care partners and community organizations whose insights shaped this plan. We also gratefully acknowledge the many community members and brain injury advocates who contributed their lived experience and expertise through the 2025 listening sessions and needs assessment surveys. Your input was instrumental to the creation of this report.

This plan was funded in part through grant number 90TBSG0057 from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.

Suggested Citation:

Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. Division of Public Health, Bureau of Chronic, Congenital and Inherited Conditions. *State Plan on Brain Injury*. Des Moines: Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, 2026. Web.
<https://hhs.iowa.gov/about/advisory-groups/iowa-hhs-brain-injury-advisory-committee>

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Executive Summary

Brain injuries affect many Iowans and can change how a person thinks, feels, learns and lives day-to-day. Whether caused by a fall, crash, assault, stroke, lack of oxygen or another event, brain injuries often create long-term needs for support. Many people with brain injury—and the people who support them—face challenges finding information, locating services, and navigating complex systems. The 2026–2029 State Plan for Brain Injury outlines Iowa’s priorities for improving access to services, strengthening prevention efforts and supporting individuals across all stages of recovery.

Developed by the Iowa Advisory Committee on Brain Injuries, the plan is grounded in a strong foundation of data, research and extensive community input. It focuses on two key areas: Service Delivery and Prevention & Education. These focus areas reflect both the immediate needs of individuals seeking access to support and the longer-term need to reduce preventable injuries and increase public understanding of brain injury across the lifespan.

Iowa HHS Brain Injury Program staff, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee on Brain Injuries, will develop a detailed implementation and evaluation plan, including outcome indicators, to guide the strategies outlined in this plan. Designed as a living document, the plan may be updated to reflect emerging needs, evaluation results and changes within Iowa’s service delivery system. Ongoing engagement from individuals with lived experience, families, support networks, providers, and community partners remains essential to ensuring the plan continues to address the needs of Iowans affected by brain injury.

Introduction

Approximately 11,145 traumatic brain injury-related emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and deaths occur each year in Iowa. Additionally, over 600,000 Iowa adults report sustaining a head injury in their lifetime. This does not include non-traumatic brain injuries (such as stroke, poisoning or lack of oxygen) or when care was either provided in a setting other than the hospital or emergency department or when care was not sought. A brain injury can result in physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral changes. While brain injuries may be classified as mild, moderate or severe, this classification does not always reflect the degree to which the brain injury will impact the life of the individual over the long-term. Ultimately, brain injuries are life-changing events that affect thousands of Iowans each year and require intentional, coordinated efforts to address their long-term impacts on individuals, families, and communities.

In 2024, the Iowa Legislature enacted HF 2673, which codifies brain injury as a recognized disability and requires all state agencies and their subdivisions recognize brain injury as a distinct disability and make reasonable efforts to identify individuals with brain injury among those served by the state agency. The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Brain Injury Services Program works to improve the lives of Iowans living with brain injuries by linking those individuals and their families to needed information, services and support as well as training service providers and other professionals on how to best work with people who have sustained a brain injury. Iowa HHS' Brain Injury Services Program works in close partnership with the Iowa Advisory Committee on Brain Injuries, whose membership spans individuals with lived experience, family members, service providers, academic partners, state agency representatives, and advocacy organizations. Together, Iowa HHS' Brain Injury Services Program and the Advisory Committee ensure the State Plan reflects both the expertise and the lived realities of Iowans across the state.

The State Plan for Brain Injury is a comprehensive, community-centered plan that was developed with insights from a variety of engagement efforts. These efforts included statewide listening sessions and a needs assessment survey. Drawing on insights from earlier planning efforts and community feedback, the plan is organized around two key focus areas:

1. Service Delivery
2. Prevention and Education

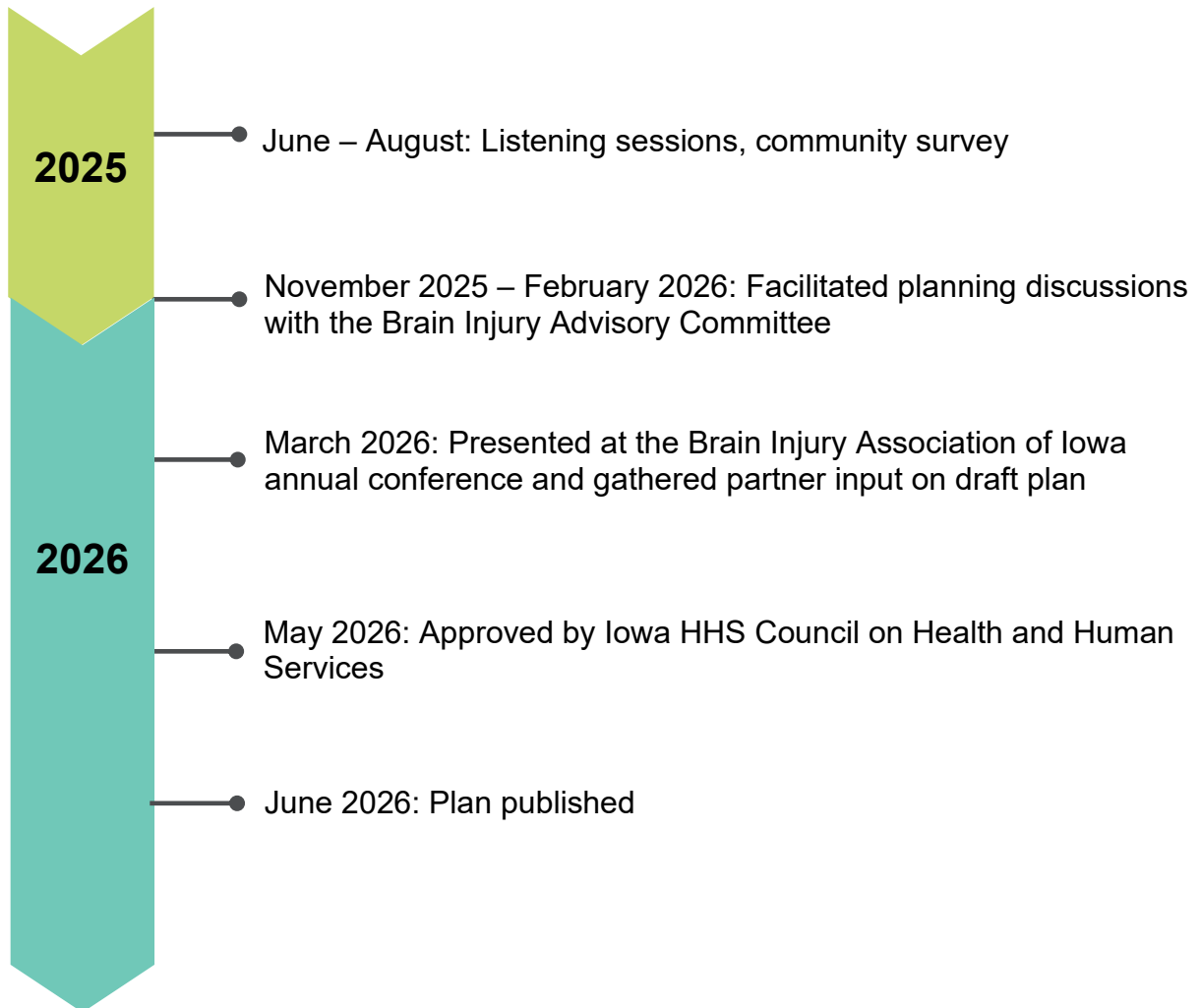
These focus areas provide a clear, actionable structure for future work. Alignment with Iowa's State Health Assessment priorities, including access to care, mental health, and healthy living, underscores the intersection of brain injury with overall health and quality of life.

Iowa HHS' Brain Injury Services Program will collaborate with the Advisory Committee to develop implementation and evaluation plans, including outcome indicators. The implementation plan will provide additional details to describe how the State Plan for Brain Injury will be put into action, including outlining timelines, prioritizing activities and guiding resource allocation. Progress will be monitored through multiple channels, including regular Advisory Committee meetings and reports to the Iowa HHS Council on Health and Human Services.

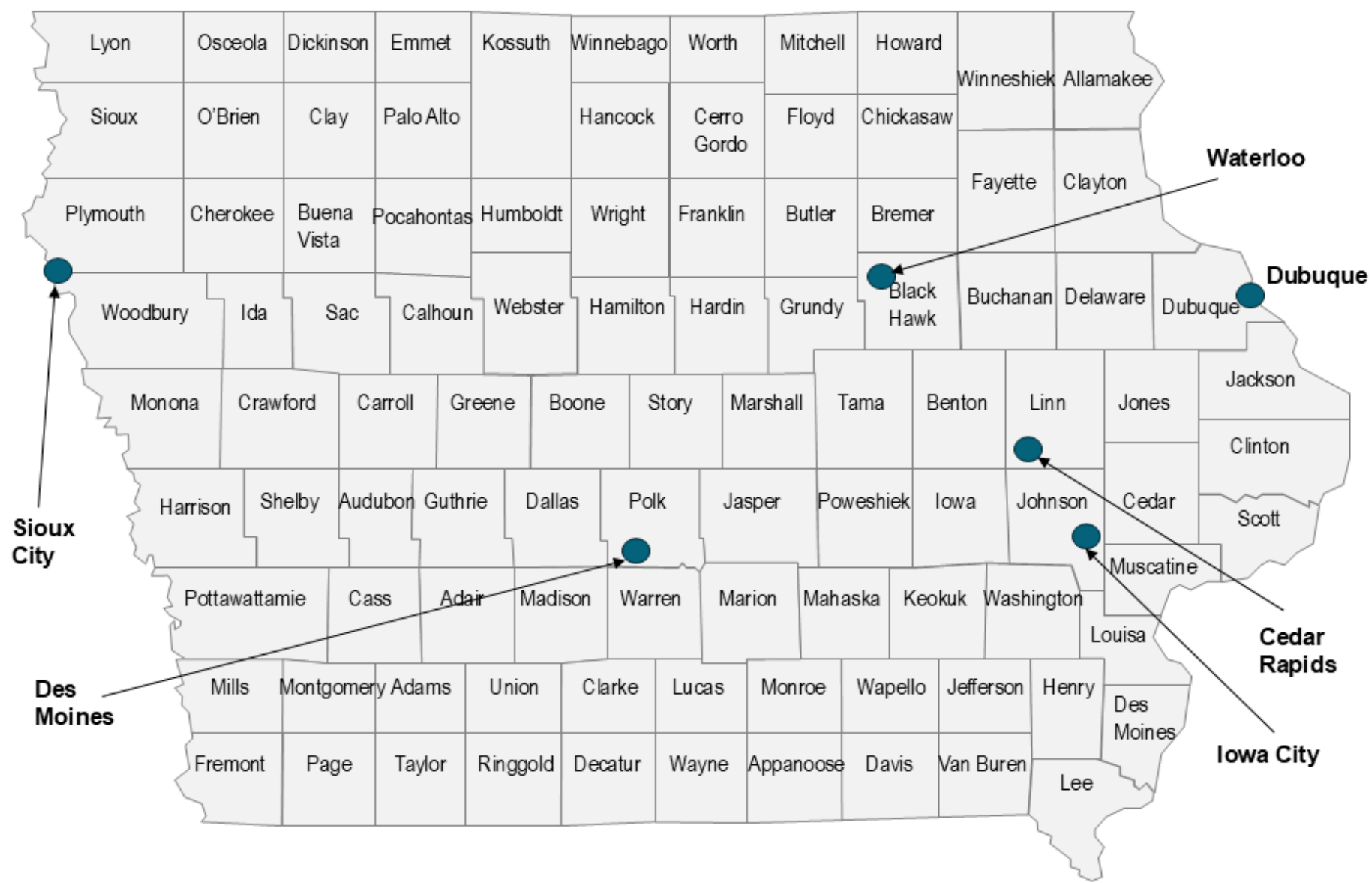


Planning Process & Community Engagement

Planning Timeline



Locations Where Listening Sessions Occurred





Focus Area: Service Delivery

Iowa's service delivery system for individuals with brain injury continues to face challenges related to timely access, coordination and provider capacity. Listening-session and survey participants identified long waitlists, difficulty navigating complex systems, insurance barriers, shortages of brain injury trained providers and limited transportation and housing options. Brain injury is often a hidden disability, and many individuals may not realize they have experienced one. As a result, people with brain injury are frequently served in settings not designed specifically for brain injury, including services for individuals who are unhoused, involved in the criminal or legal system, or experiencing domestic violence, as well as mental health, substance-use, and other community programs. At the same time, Iowa's brain-injury-specific service systems face many of the same challenges as other sectors.

Strengthening this focus area will require evaluating how brain injury services are delivered in Iowa, enhancing screening and care coordination, building a strong, supported workforce, and increasing timely access to both medical and community-based services. Together, these efforts will help create a more accessible, coordinated, and responsive system of care for Iowans living with brain injury and their support systems.

Strategy 1: Conduct an environmental scan to assess the delivery of brain injury services in Iowa.

Tactics

- 1.1 Identify gaps in care and barriers to brain injury services in Iowa.
- 1.2 Publish a report with findings and recommendations for improvement.
- 1.3 Share evaluation recommendations with providers, partners and the public.

Strategy 2: Strengthen brain injury screening, service coordination and workforce capacity.

Tactics

- 2.1 Prioritize the settings and professions that would benefit from additional brain injury screening and referral training.
- 2.2 Train community partners on screening, symptom management and referral options, including information about Brain Injury Resource Facilitation.
- 2.3 Offer a variety of accessible training options to strengthen person-centered planning skills for staff.
- 2.4 Assess the workforce needs of providers and community organizations.

Strategy 3: Increase timely access to medical and community-based services.

Tactics

- 3.1 Promote the use of Brain Injury Resource Facilitation services.
- 3.2 Explore alternative options for Iowans who need support but do not qualify for Medicaid waivers.

Measures of Success:

- Reduction in the number of individuals reporting unmet service needs after utilizing brain injury resource facilitation. *Data source: Brain Injury Association of Iowa.*
- Increase in the number of Iowa HHS programs & partner organizations implementing standardized brain injury screening protocols. *Data source: Iowa HHS Brain Injury Program Snapshots.*
- Increase the percentage of trained professionals reporting increase in confidence for supporting individuals with cognitive or behavioral changes. *Data Source: Iowa HHS brain injury training evaluation reports.*
- Increase in referrals to Brain Injury Resource Facilitation from priority settings. *Data Source: Brain Injury Association of Iowa.*



Focus Area: Prevention & Education

Preventing brain injuries and helping Iowans better understand both traumatic and non-traumatic brain injuries are key to reducing long-term disability and improving quality of life. Public health data helps Iowa identify who is most at risk, the most common causes of injury, and where prevention efforts can make the biggest difference. Strengthening Iowa's prevention work requires coordinated efforts across healthcare, education, aging services, and community partners to promote safer environments, reduce injury risk, and improve early identification and management of concussions and other brain injuries.

Effective prevention and education also depend on strong partnerships and consistent messaging. By collaborating across Iowa HHS programs and with external organizations that share prevention goals, Iowa can extend the reach of awareness campaigns, training efforts, and educational materials. This includes providing accessible training opportunities for communities statewide and increasing public awareness through policy briefs, statewide toolkits, and accessible community education. These combined efforts ensure that prevention strategies are broadly accessible and help Iowans better recognize ways to reduce injury risk, understand common symptoms after brain injury, and learn strategies for living well following a brain injury.

Strategy 4: Strengthen partnerships with Iowa HHS programs.

Tactics

- 4.1 Identify Iowa HHS programs that can help increase brain injury awareness and prevention efforts.
- 4.2 Collaborate with Iowa HHS programs to increase the reach of brain injury education and programming.
- 4.3 Ensure existing Iowa HHS programming is inclusive of people with brain injuries.

Strategy 5: Reduce preventable brain injuries using evidence-based practices.

Tactics

- 5.1 Identify and collaborate with groups that share prevention priorities.
- 5.2 Use data to find populations most at risk and guide prevention strategies.

Strategy 6: Improve concussion prevention and management.

Tactics

- 6.1 Identify ways to improve concussion tracking and reporting in Iowa for non-school related injuries.
- 6.2 Promote the use of the Teacher Acute Concussion Tool in schools through activities such as webinars, flyer dissemination, and newsletter articles.

Strategy 7: Raise awareness about non-traumatic and traumatic brain injuries and their causes.

Tactics

- 7.1 Develop policy briefs on prevention-related topics.
- 7.2 Share public awareness messages about the leading causes of traumatic brain injury (falls, motor vehicle crashes, and assaults).
- 7.3 Develop toolkits for Brain Injury Awareness Month and Concussion Awareness Day to ensure consistent statewide messaging.
- 7.4 Offer Brain Injury 101 trainings online and in communities across Iowa.

Measures of Success:

- Increase in the number of schools using the Teacher Acute Concussion Tool. *Data Source: Iowa HHS Annual TACT Utilization Report.*
- Improvement in completeness or accuracy of statewide concussion tracking. *Data Source: Iowa HHS TACT database.*
- Increase in number of recommendations for prevention initiatives informed by state data. *Source: Iowa HHS Brain Injury Program & partners.*
- Increased attendance at or completion of Brain Injury 101 or other education opportunities. *Source: Brain Injury Association of Iowa Training Report.*

Stay Connected

The 2026-2029 State Plan for Brain Injury is a living document.

Changes may occur in this document throughout the course of the three-year period. Updates may be made to reflect evaluation findings, newly identified needs and changes within Iowa's service delivery system. Ongoing feedback from individuals with lived experience, families, providers, and community partners is welcomed and encouraged. Your insights help ensure that the plan remains responsive, effective and aligned with the needs of Iowans affected by brain injury.

To learn more about the Iowa Advisory Committee on Brain Injuries, including how to apply to be a member, or to participate in a future state planning or needs assessment process, please email brain.injury@hhs.iowa.gov.

Connect with us:



Iowa HHS Website: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/health-prevention/brain-memory-health>

To access the Iowa HHS website, use the URL above or scan this QR code using your smart phone's camera.



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