

The Nebraska Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Program
Advisory Committee Meeting
May 07, 2026
Meeting Minutes
09:00a.m. - 11:14a.m.

<u>Members</u>	<u>Guest</u>	<u>Staff</u>
Jonathan Arteaga	Alejandra Amaro	Angel Sumpter-McFarland
Laura Beshaler		Clare Koneck-Wilcox
Hannah Ditmars		Stacy Luther
Linsay Darnall Jr.		Mujtaba Ebrahim
Heather Gomes		
Cassie Garner		
Melissa Henry		
Rebecca Hoffman		
Lisa Hobza		<u>Interpreters</u>
Shelli Janning		Deb Knerr
Kristin Jolkowski		Lacey Easton
Sara Peterson		
Vicki Steinhauer- Campbell		
Merry Spratford		
Rebecca Hoffman		

1. Introductions:

Mujtaba Ebrahim, Community Health Educator for the Nebraska Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (NE-EHDI), welcomed everyone and introduced himself.

Meeting start time – EHDI Community Health Educator, Mujtaba Ebrahim, called the meeting to order at **09:05 a.m.**

Mujtaba Ebrahim presented the Open Meeting Act at the beginning of the Advisory Committee Meeting. The Open Meeting Act was read aloud, with ASL interpreters and Zoom etiquette reviewed for the EHDI Advisory Committee.

Mujtaba Ebrahim noted that the NE-EHDI Advisory Committee strives to improve the lives of children in Nebraska who are deaf or hard of hearing by promoting, developing, and supporting systems to ensure that all newborns in Nebraska receive hearing screenings, family-centered evaluations, and early intervention as appropriate. NE-EHDI is an unbiased program that informs families of available resources, and we respect their right to determine what's best for their family. Mujtaba also stated that the committee has **2** advisory committee meetings per year due to budget limitations. He advised members and guests to refrain from using the words "hearing loss" or "hearing impaired." This may be difficult, since some members may not view these words as negative, but we do recognize them as negative for some members. If these terms are used during the meeting, all members will recognize that the intent is not to be negative or disrespectful. Thank you, members, for sharing your valuable perspectives.

Program Manager Angel Sumpter – McFarland gave a quick review of the EHDI Advisory Committee Zoom etiquette.

2. Review of Agenda:

Mujtaba Ebrahim gave a review of our agenda and the meeting description. Describing who and what they would be presenting.

3. Review of October 2025 Minutes

A copy of the October **2025** meeting minutes was emailed to all committee members. Mujtaba Ebrahim asked members if they would like to have any changes made to the meeting minutes and if they approved of them.

4. Nebraska Hands & Voices Update:

Shelli Janning, Nebraska Hands & Voices Guide by Your Side (GBYS) Program Coordinator, shared updates on Nebraska Family support programs through the group. There are **11** parent guides throughout the state and **163** families being served through GBYS. Nebraska Hands & Voices is made up of **16** board members. **13** of the board members have a child who is deaf and/or hard of hearing. Shelli highlighted Hands & Voices' current program challenges, including the loss of their **\$100,000** Department of Education grant. Shelli discussed their efforts to secure alternative funding sources. Shelli made note that the priority will still be helping families that are referred

and who the program is currently serving. Merry Spratford offered to share potential grant opportunities.

Shelli made note of the Educational Advocacy Support and Training Program (ASTra). The program started in 2023; in 2025 alone, the program directly supported **15** families. The support was provided through different methods, whichever the family preferred. The program directly reached **350** people with their newsletter, emailing resources and tips geared towards education, advocacy, and support. Shelli also made note that the ASTra program does not receive official funding from Hands & Voices but is funded through memberships, grants, and donations.

GBYS Newsletter:

The Guide By Your Side Program has also created a monthly newsletter. The newsletter is sent out to GBYS families either through hardcopy or electronically. The newsletter spotlights a “rising star,” which is a D/HH youth who stands out as a positive role model to their community and peers. The recipient receives a **\$20** Amazon gift card as well as their picture placed into the newsletter. The newsletter also highlights a parent guide, highlighting how the program's parent guides are doing.

Hands & Voices Referral Statistics (Referral Sources of open cases):

- EHDI – 75 (46%)
- Regional Programs – 33 (20%)
- Audiologist – 11 (7%)
- Parent Guides – 6 (4%)
- Hands & Voices website, Facebook, events, email – 38 (23%)
- Total Open Cases: 163

Hands & Voices Ages of Children Currently Being Served:

- Ages 0 to 3 – 56 (34%)
- Ages 4 to 5 – 32 (32%)
- Ages 6 to 17 – 74 (45%)
- Ages 18 to 21- 1 (1%)

5. University Of Nebraska HearU/ Hearing Aid Bank Update:

Dr. Stacie Ray, with the University of Nebraska HearU program, presented information on current HearU Statistics, as detailed below.

HearU Nebraska Annual Statistics (past 5 years)

- **54** Hearing Aids were fit on **29** Children in **2021**
- **27** Hearing Aids were fit on **17** Children in **2022**
- **43** Hearing Aids were fit on **24** Children in **2023**
- **61** Hearing Aids were fit on **36** Children in **2024**
- **46** Hearing Aids were fit on **28** Children in **2025**.
- 2008-Current: **1,075** Hearing Aids fit on **641** Children
- Over **210** Communities Served

Dr. Stacie Ray, director of HearU Nebraska, presented an overview of the nonprofit organization's mission and operations. The program provides hearing aids and support services to children from birth through age 18 who are newly identified with hearing differences and do not qualify for Medicaid or cannot afford private coverage. HearU Nebraska receives **\$30,300** annually from Nebraska EHDI and serves approximately 30-60 children per year across over **210** Nebraska communities, having provided **1,075** hearing aids to **641** children since its inception **18** years ago. The organization operates through a tiered service model, with Tier 1 providing loaned hearing aids and support to qualifying families, while also supporting a graduate student assistant who manages the program's operations. Dr. Ray also noted that the HearU Advisory Board currently focuses on community outreach and long-term sustainability. Dr. Ray lastly made note that HearU Nebraska is more than a hearing aid bank. They provide direct support for families and providers beyond devices. The annual EHDI Sub-award provides critical support, allowing HearU to serve families across the state.

6. Nebraska Association Of the Deaf Update:

Nicole Froehlich, NEAD Program Coordinator, presented about the NEAD (Nebraska Association of the Deaf) Program. Nicole shared details about their work supporting deaf and hard of hearing children through home visits, ASL instruction, and community events. The program currently serves **12** children across **6** families, with **50%** having **profound hearing loss**. Jonathan Artega and Vicki Steinhauer-Campbell, who are with NEAD, discussed their ongoing efforts to secure funding for the program, noting that while funding is currently limited due to a temporary moratorium, they are continuing activities through volunteer efforts and seeking new funding opportunities. They also mentioned an ongoing ASL story time event held the second Tuesday of every month at the Omaha Library from 4:00-4:30 PM.

7. Review of program and Program Updates:

Angel Sumpter-McFarland, manager of the Early Hearing Detection & Intervention program, presented an overview of our current NE-EHDI funding and requirements from the three sources of funding for the NE-EHDI Program: (HRSA, CDC, and MCH Title V Block Grant). Angel also made note that NE-EHDI has no state funding and is all federal income. Angel also pointed out the family support agreements NE-EHDI regularly renews: Nebraska Hands & Voices, HearU Nebraska, Nebraska Association of the Deaf. Angel spoke on strengthening the advisory committee moving forward in a meaningful and collaborative way. The goal is to build upon the strong foundation already set and continue having the committee evolve into a space that is collaborative, solution-focused, and impactful. The team discussed plans to strengthen the EHDI Advisory Committee by improving representation, communication, and collaboration, with a focus on transitioning from passive participation to active engagement. As well as transitioning from individual perspectives to collective problem-solving. Lastly, moving towards a working committee, not just a meeting. And a collaborative space for real solutions.

Angel also presented the HRSA Grant objectives for the years (2024-2029).

- **HRSA Grant Objectives:**

- Strengthen statewide coordination.
- Collect & Report Statewide data.
- Improve language acquisition outcomes.
- Strengthen family-to-family support.
- Include DHH Adult to Family Connections

8. NE-EHDI Special Program Updates:

Mujtaba Ebrahim, Community Health Educator Sr. for Nebraska EHDI, updated the committee on special programs that EHDI has updated for the HRSA agreement implementation phase 2, including: cCMV awareness, Hospital Champions Campaign, Educational Materials, and EHDI Newsletter.

cCMV Awareness:

Mujtaba talked about how NE-EHDI to date has sent out over **8,325+** cCMV fact sheets, and how the information was adapted from the CDC (ensuring accuracy).

Measles Outbreak:

*As of September 23rd 2025 a total of 1,514 confirmed cases of measles were reported by 42 jurisdictions.

- 1 in Nebraska
- 12 in South Dakota
- 90 in Kansas

Measles is the most contagious virus known to infect humans. To put this in perspective, nine out of 10 susceptible individuals exposed to measles will be infected. Measles infection is a serious disease that can lead to severe complications, including death. Those most at risk are young children, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems.

Before the MMR vaccination, measles was a significant cause of sensorineural loss in children, accounting for about 5-10% of the population. Measles continues to be a common cause of profound hearing loss in areas in which measles vaccinations are rare. Nebraska DHHS and local public health departments conduct thorough investigations of each case, including reaching out to any identified contacts and notifying the public of locations of possible exposure. The best prevention for measles is the measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine.

Hospital Champions Campaign:

Clare Koneck-Wilcox & Mujtaba Ebrahim discussed the Hospital Champions campaign, which aimed to strengthen Nebraska's newborn screening systems by providing training and resources to hospitals across the state. The campaign included visits to four different ESU sites where NE-EHDI and a team member from the Dry Blood Spot team conducted training sessions, with 49 attendees representing 23 different hospitals. The survey results showed positive feedback overall, with 53.33% rating the training as excellent & 40% rating the training very good. Most participants found the event length appropriate. Key areas for improvement identified included providing clearer information about training goals beforehand and potentially separating the dried blood spot training from NE-EHDI training, as these departments are different. The team plans to host another round of the Hospital Champions campaign in July and early August.

NE-EHDI Newsletter:

NE-EHDI has started a monthly newsletter highlighting upcoming meetings, events, and resources. It also highlights community opportunities, shows, and events from our non-profits. Overall, a way of keeping everyone in the loop about recent events in the NE-EHDI community.

9. NE-EHDI Program Data: Clare Koneck-Wilcox, Business Analyst for NE-EHDI, presented state 1-3-6 hearing statistics vs the National average.

Screening by 1 month 2025 Average: Nebraska: 95.6% US:NA

Diagnosis by 3 months 2025 Average: Nebraska: 45% US:NA

Early Intervention services by 6 months Average:Nebraska: 39.6% US :NA

10. Presenters:

Nebraska Association of the Deaf – Presented by Vicki Steinhauer Campbell

Hands & Voices Updates – Presented by Shelli Janning

Program Updates – Angel Sumpter-McFarland

Special Program Updates – Mujtaba Ebrahim

11. Adjourn:

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Kristin Jolkowski at 11:14 a.m.

Review/Approval of Minutes from October 2023 meeting:

The October 2025 minutes were approved by Sara Peterson.

Dates and Locations for Next Meetings: October 08th 2026, Nebraska State Office Building (Meadow Lark Room) & May 06th, 2027, via Zoom.

Meeting Adjourned 11:14 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Angel Sumpter-McFarland

Mujtaba Ebrahim

Stacy Luther

Clare Koneck-Wilcox