

**MEMORANDUM**

**To: DRRC Members**

**From: Peter Thomas and Natalie Keller, DRRC Co-Coordiators**

**Date: January 12, 2026**

**Re: DRRC 2025 Year in Review and Proposed Agenda for 2026**

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**Executive Summary**

As we begin 2026, we want to recognize the accomplishments of the coalition in 2025 and provide a summary of the efforts made on behalf of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition (DRRC) and its member organizations over the past twelve months. Additionally, we are providing DRRC members with a forecast of issues that the coalition may engage in over the coming year in preparation for our annual meeting where we will revise our priorities and vote to approve our 2026 priorities.

The DRRC is a unique coalition of organizations concerned with the state of disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research at the federal level. The coalition's strength is readily apparent in its consecutive years of advancing its dynamic and diverse portfolio of issues. DRRC had another record year in 2025, engaging with policymakers, federal agencies, and the research community to advance our priorities and other key issues as they arose. The year was consumed with playing defense in light of intense pressure from the Trump Administration to reduce federal funding, cut programs, reduce the federal workforce, and restructure entire research agencies. While we have made great strides from the darkest days of the first and second quarter of 2025, many of the issues we addressed have yet to be fully resolved.

Further information on the DRRC's activities, as well as our advocacy archives, can be found on the DRRC's website at [www.drcc-coalition.org](http://www.drcc-coalition.org). Although there are major challenges and some opportunities in 2026, we encourage DRRC members to review this memo and consider any suggestions for continued or new policy priorities in the coming year. We will discuss our work this year and our plans for next year at the upcoming DRRC Annual Meeting on Monday, February 9, 2026, from 12:00 – 2:00 PM (EST) and encourage everyone to attend in person or participate virtually. Lunch will be served for those who attend in person.

For more information about the Annual Meeting, please contact Natalie Keller at [Natalie.Keller@PowersLaw.com](mailto:Natalie.Keller@PowersLaw.com).

## **DRRC Successes in 2025**

Throughout 2025, the coalition engaged in advocacy efforts to support federal funding and policy development for disability and rehabilitation research programs. These efforts involved coordination with multiple federal agencies, congressional offices, and community stakeholders during a year of significant challenge and administrative changes across health and human services agencies.

### *Agency Engagement and Relationship Building*

- Established direct dialogue with the Administration for Community Living (ACL) Administrator and senior staff regarding the state of disability and rehabilitation research programs nationwide
- Sustained collaborative partnerships with the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) and the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research (NCMRR), including NCMRR's parent organization, the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
- Renewed and strengthened working relationship with the NIH Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) leadership and disability policy staff to advance proposals for a dedicated Disability Research Office and promote disability inclusion recommendations across NIH institutes

### *Policy Response and Advocacy*

- Authored and sent timely response to proposed federal funding restrictions affecting HHS programs
- Communicated stakeholder perspectives on proposed changes to indirect cost policies at NIH
- Conducted sustained outreach to House and Senate Appropriations Committees throughout the annual budget process including in person advocacy meetings with key appropriations offices and development of advocacy materials
- Submitted detailed comments on the NIH Strategic Plan for Disability Health Research Request for Information (RFI)
- Conveyed community concerns to the HHS Secretary regarding proposed structural changes to ACL

### *Community Mobilization*

- Coordinated letter supporting NIDILRR funding that garnered endorsements from over 100 organizations and more than 850 individuals
- Organized separate letter supporting NIH/NCMRR funding that secured backing from over 80 organizations and more than 300 individuals
- Issued statement addressing workforce changes at HHS affecting program continuity

### *Congressional Communications*

- Corresponded with members from both parties on the Appropriations Committees advocating for disability and rehabilitation research funding in FY 2026
- Sent correspondence to Senate leadership supporting passage of Labor-HHS appropriations legislation
- Developed comprehensive funding analysis documents and comparison spreadsheets for coalition members tracking House proposals, Senate proposals, and Presidential Budget Request figures
- Advocated to both chambers' Appropriations Committees for robust funding levels for disability and rehabilitation research programs

### **Proposed Next Steps for 2026**

In 2025, DRRC continued its consistent advocacy for federally funded rehabilitation and disability research programs amid significant administrative and budgetary threats. The year brought both challenges and opportunities that required increased coalition engagement and strategic advocacy.

Throughout the year, the coalition monitored evolving federal policies affecting research funding, including proposed reorganizations within the Department of Health and Human Services and discussions about structural changes at NIH. Several developments required coordinated responses from the disability research community, including proposed funding restrictions, workforce adjustments at federal agencies, and ongoing conversations about the organizational placement of key research programs like NIDILRR. These circumstances reinforced the importance of unified advocacy to maintain program stability and research continuity.

The DRRC members demonstrated exceptional engagement throughout 2025, stepping up to meet these challenges with remarkable commitment. Member organizations actively participated in coordinated advocacy campaigns, contributed to community letters that secured support from over 100 organizations and more than 850 individuals, and provided valuable input on strategic priorities. This member involvement was essential to the coalition's effectiveness in representing the disability research community's interests during a demanding year.

Simultaneously, 2025 presented meaningful opportunities for advancing the coalition's objectives. Discussions continued regarding the establishment of enhanced coordination mechanisms for disability research across NIH, building on recommendations from community stakeholders and aligning with DRRC's long-standing priorities. These conversations about research infrastructure offered potential pathways to strengthen the visibility and impact of rehabilitation science within the federal research portfolio.

In 2025, DRRC coordinated comprehensive advocacy efforts on behalf of the disability research community, addressing both immediate funding priorities and longer-term structural considerations for federal research programs. Looking ahead to 2026, the coalition anticipates

continued engagement on these critical issues and welcomes the sustained, active participation of DRRC member organizations in collaborative efforts to support research that benefits the disability and rehabilitation communities we serve.

**Conclusion**

2026 is expected to be an exceptionally challenging year for disability and rehabilitation research funding, programmatic consistency, and structural integrity of multiple federal research agencies that address rehabilitation, independent living, and disability research. It is a critical time to invest as a coalition in relationships and coordinated advocacy to preserve our hard-won victories over the past few decades. We will need every DRRC organization to dig deep to both provide a sufficient war chest to wage our policy and advocacy efforts and to contribute in-kind through intellectual engagement and active participation in the coalition. Thank you for your membership of the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Coalition. If we can answer any questions you may have, please contact, Natalie Keller, DRRC Co-Coordinator at [Natalie.Keller@powerslaw.com](mailto:Natalie.Keller@powerslaw.com).

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