**Proposal to Amend Registry of Unmet Needs Contract to Increase by $30,000 for Necessary Additional Community Engagement, Education, and Communications**

This is a short-term proposal to increase the NCCDD Council Contract with MHTA for Year 1 of its four-year initiative by $30,000 with a $10,000 match. This proposal would fund the Mental Health Transformation Alliance (MHTA) through its Leadership Alliance for Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LAND) program to engage in additional Community Engagement, Education and Communications programming related to 1915(i) Medicaid Services, the Direct Support Professional Workforce Crisis, and Unmet Needs This is in part based on current environmental issues that impact the Registry of Unmet Needs which require immediate action that were not envisioned when the original Request for Applications (RFA) was drafted. Being able to leverage these issues in a timely manner is paramount to the success of our overall Unmet Needs initiative.

North Carolina is undergoing a significant transformation in its Medicaid services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) that could potentially meet the unmet needs of a substantial number of people on the Registry of Unmet Needs. The Registry of Unmet Needs is North Carolina’s waiting list with over 15,000 individuals with I/DD in which most individuals with I/DD must wait for over ten years for services to enable them to live full and meaningful lives in the community. To meet the needs of individuals on the Registry, North Carolina is transitioning from services funded as (b)(3) of the federal Medicaid statute to services funded through 1915(i). By electing to provide services through 1915(i), individuals with I/DD who have Medicaid will become eligible (by entitlement) for I/DD Medicaid services. This includes not only those who are eligible for the Innovations Waiver. Most of these services will be similar to the services for which people with I/DD have been waiting for years. This is why a change to 1915(i) is an unprecedented opportunity to meet the unmet needs of individuals on the waiting list.

At the same time, due to low wages, the pandemic, inflation, and the country’s workforce crisis, North Carolina is experiencing an unprecedented shortage of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). There is the potential for some relief in the DSP crisis based on North Carolina’s Medicaid Transformation, the change to 1915(i), and recent increased funds for DSPs allocated by the North Carolina legislature. But that will only be some relief. The crisis continues. The DSP crisis is a key issue, especially when it is clear those eligible for I/DD services and supports will increase with the availability of 1915(i) services available to a broader group of individuals. Also, research suggests that many people with I/DD are not aware of the Innovations Waiver or the impending 1915(i) array in North Carolina. Plain language communications for self-advocates and their families as well as simple navigational tools will be essential to enable the most successful impact for those with I/DD for the Tailored Plan rollout, an increased understanding of needed services, or how to navigate them.

Thus, it is essential to increase community engagement, education, and communications programming related to 1915(i), the DSP workforce crisis, and unmet needs to lay the foundation for helping all those with I/DD in North Carolina to live the most successful lives possible.

**MHTA’s Four-Year Registry of Unmet Needs Initiative**

In 2021, NCCDD awarded MHTA a four-year competitive grant to do research and strategy development, community engagement, policy education, and communications related to the unmet needs of people with I/DD in North Carolina. As part of that grant, NCCDD requested that the successful applicant bring together diverse stakeholders and engage in Collective Impact to set the agenda for the initiative.

MHTA is on track to meet its deliverables for the first year of this initiative. It has brought together an extraordinary array of stakeholders from across North Carolina’s I/DD community. It has developed four strong working committees/groups of stakeholders for each of the four key areas of the grant. It has a robust array of subcontractors supporting the work of the grant that are each doing significant work to meet the deliverables.

MHTA and NCCDD have been full partners in this initiative with NCCDD staff sitting as part of each working committee/group. Together, MHTA and NCCDD have determined that there is a need for additional community engagement, education, and communications programming related to 1915(i), the DSP workforce crisis, and the unmet needs than is currently funded in this current fiscal year of the initiative. This is due to the seismic transformation happening in Medicaid and the increased DSP workforce crisis. Additional funds will help us take better leverage the current Medicaid changes going on now in North Carolina in the most timely way in the short term, which will help lay the foundation for systemic change in the future.

NCCDD also recognizes that the public comment prior to the closing of the competitive RFA that made clear that there was concern that more funded work was needed to accomplish the overall goals of this initiative.

For all of these reasons, this proposal would fund MHTA to do the following as additional work under its current contract:

* Host two (2) or more in-person community engagement and awareness events in partnership with NCCDD in different parts of North Carolina, which may incorporate music, stories, and information and education related to 1915(i), the DSP workforce crisis, and unmet needs. These would serve as pilots for the grassroots network that is intended to be formed and moved across the state, that would also serve as the means of sustaining the initiative after the four years of funding.
* Increase paid self-advocates’ involvement in communication education, engagement, and communications related to the above through the development of a “Lived Experience” Network made up of self-advocates and advocates Support NCCDD in its policy education work related to 1915(i) and the DSP workforce crisis.
* Advise and work with NCCDD and its initiative partners, as needed, on identifying people with I/DD who have unmet needs, their family members, guardians, DSPs, and other partners who can share their stories to be used for a potential photo/film project beyond the story gathering included in the original RFA. Also, provide assistance, as needed, with the film-maker or photojournalist on that separate but related initiative.
* Advise and work with NCCDD and its initiative partners, as needed, on the potential impact of 1915(i), unmet needs, and the DSP workforce crisis on its key stakeholder base.