



## Celebrating March Brain Injury Awareness Month

### National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

---

During March, the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA) has featured stories about the impact of brain injury on individuals and families, as well as state resources and initiatives developed to provide supports and assistance. This week, NASHIA highlights the work of Nebraskans in promoting brain injury awareness, education, and advocacy. To view past Spotlights, click [here](#).



### The Nebraska Brain Injury Alliance Recognizes Individuals who Have Made a Difference

The Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska honored five Nebraskans for their roles in providing continued education, creating awareness and supporting persons with brain injury in the state at the Nebraska Brain Injury Conference held in Kearney, NE, last week, March 22-23.

#### Meet Nebraska Advocates of the Year

**Martha Douglas** epitomizes what it is to be an advocate. Douglas' cause is the continued support of brain injury survivors of all ages living with the effects of brain injury in western Nebraska. She is a speech pathologist who spends hours on the road traveling to do this work. The Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska awards the **Advocate of the Year** to a member of the brain injury community of survivors and health professionals who works with, cares about and chooses to advocate for those with brain injury. This person seizes opportunities to bring awareness to brain injury in any form or to advocate for those with brain injury. An advocate is defined as a supporter, promoter, believer, who encourages and is in favor of a cause



Realizing advocacy and care doesn't end when a person is released from the hospital; Douglas also facilitates support groups in Scottsbluff, Alliance and Chadron. She encourages survivors and their families in the rural area to remain active and connected as she knows the journey after brain injury can be long and lonely. Douglas is a stellar advocate promoting needed community resources. For these reasons, the Alliance recognized Martha Douglas as the Advocate of the Year!

The **Above and Beyond Award** is given to someone in their community who has gone above and beyond and gives tirelessly for brain injury causes. **Barry Harper Barry** has gone above and beyond in service to others throughout his adult life. After Barry's retirement from the Air Force, his brother suffered a brain injury which required Barry to step into a conservator and caregiver role. In 2010, Barry had a brain injury too. As he has recovered, Barry has used his personal experience in continued service to others. Barry is an active member of his area brain injury support group. As a voice for survivors of brain injury, family caregivers, and the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska, Barry has worked to increase awareness for resources across the state. Barry was a faithful volunteer for the BIA when we were sending monthly email updates to members of the Veterans Brain Injury Task Force. Barry as a Veteran, a Survivor, a Family Caregiver, and a proud Nebraskan has gone above and beyond in his service to others.

**Keri Bennett**, received the **Advocacy Leadership Award** for her work at the state and national level to improve policies, programs, and services for individuals with brain injury and their families. Keri is the NE VR Program Director for ABI and Autism.

The annual Nebraska Brain Injury Conference seeks to meet the education needs of survivors living with disabling brain injuries and healthcare professionals who work with them. For more information on the activities of the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska, go to [biane.org](http://biane.org). Peggy Reisher is the Executive Director.

---

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. -- Helen Keller



## Nebraska's Services

As with most states, the Nebraska Brain Injury Association (BIA-NE), now known as the Alliance, and other individuals with brain injury and their families, were instrumental in bringing attention to the state with regard to the incidence and prevalence of TBI and their resulting needs. Currently, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) houses the Nebraska Brain Injury Advisory Council, and its members are appointed by the NDE Commissioner of Education. It started, though, with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Special Education Office receiving two one-year planning grants from the U.S. Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal Child Health Bureau (HRSA/MCHB) for 2000-01 and 2001-02. The grants were the result of funding from the TBI Act of 1996.

The Advisory Board was created and authorized in state statute until June 2002. During the two-year planning phase, the TBI Advisory Board led activities to ensure that the required four core components of a culturally competent state system for TBI services were established; a lead agency, an advisory board, a statewide needs and resources assessment and a statewide action plan. In August 2002, Nebraska received the first of several TBI Implementation Partnership Grants from the Federal TBI Program located in HRSA/MCHB with NDE serving as lead agency.

In 2008, Governor Dave Heineman designated Nebraska VR as lead agency for the grant. Nebraska is now winding up activities from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) Federal TBI State Partnership Grant, resulting in resource facilitation services carried out by the Alliance; information and referral services (I&R) from four agencies (Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska, Disability Rights Nebraska, Hotline for Disabilities, and Aging and Disability Resource Center); training across professional disciplines; and screening of young children for TBI.

(The federal grant administration was transferred from HRSA to the ACL as the result of the TBI Act Reauthorization of 2014.)