

Sharing Personal Journeys During Brain Injury Awareness

During March, Brain Injury Awareness Month is observed nationwide. The 2024 theme, "My Brain Injury Journey," selected by the Brain Injury Association of American (BIAA), encourages everyone to learn more about the experiences of those individuals living and thriving with brain injuries.

Acquired brain injury (ABI) includes a wide range of disorders and diseases affecting the brain, with onset after birth. ABIs are broken into two major categories: non-traumatic and traumatic. Non-traumatic injuries result from events such as stroke, infections, overdoses or toxins, tumors, and more. Traumatic brain injuries (TBI) occur by external forces such as falls, motor vehicle accidents, sports, military combat, and interpersonal violence.

"Brain injuries can happen to anyone and are often invisible to us. Brain injury is often referred to as the silent epidemic." Massachusetts Brain Injury Council

Every brain injury is unique to the injury and the person. Brain injuries can impact an individual physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Examples of these effects include a lack of energy, headaches, decreased awareness of social rules, depression, and impairment of memory, attention, and problem-solving skills.

At Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), we envision a Commonwealth that is open to all, where everyone can seize their true potential and contribute fully to our communities and the world. We are the lead state agency for brain injury programs in the state. At MRC, people with brain injuries can participate in all of our programs and our specialized brain injury services, such as the Statewide Head Injury Program (SHIP) and the ABI/MFP Waiver Programs. Services in these programs can include residential and community-based services such as case management. These programs empower and support individuals to live on their own terms. The agency assists in medical and service coordination, applying for benefits, cognitive supports, and strategies. Additionally, MRC supports five Brain Injury Community Centers across the state. You can inquire and apply for MRC programs through [MRC Connect](#).

MRC collaborates closely with the [Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts \(BIA-MA\)](#), which offers support groups, information and referral services, and ongoing education for anyone working to navigate the brain injury systems. BIA-MA has recently launched a Neuro-Resource Facilitation Program, which aims to support individuals who need additional assistance in navigating and applying for services and support related to their brain injury.

Kristina Kahale is a young professional and fierce advocate for those who have survived brain injuries. Kristina suffered her traumatic brain injury from a drunk driver and felt strongly about sharing the battles she faced and how drastically her life was impacted. Kristina is a Support Group Facilitator for young adults with brain injury and a Massachusetts Brain Injury Council member. Through her own lived experiences, she has connected with others and shared helpful strategies and advice. She has also shared her journey with neuro-psych physicians and as part of the "Brains at Risk" and "Survivor's Voice," which spread awareness around dangerous

driving and TBIs. She hopes with education and awareness, others with a TBI or ABI will have the support and resources they need to push forward.

As part of its work to include the voices of those with lived experience, MRC co-facilitates the Massachusetts Brain Injury Council with the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts. The Council, comprised of state agencies, community-based providers, and individuals with lived experience of brain injury, aims to improve brain injury services and awareness across the Commonwealth. Together, we work to expand what's possible in the lives of people with brain injuries and disabilities.

If you or someone you know are interested or would like to learn more, contact Amanda Tower at amanda.tower@mass.gov.

To learn more about brain injury, effects, supports and services please visit any of these resources:

- [ACL Grant Page \(Beyond Bridges Project\)](#)
- [Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts](#)
- [National Association of State Head Injury Administrators](#)