



About the Commission

The Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission has granted 3,783 awards worth over \$15 million to Georgians with traumatic brain and/or spinal cord injuries since 2003. (Jan. 2011)

Our Mission

The mission of the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund Commission is to enhance the lives of Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. Guided by the aspirations of people with traumatic injuries, the Commission supports lives of meaning, independence, and inclusion. As the state's Lead Agency on Traumatic Injuries, we:

- Administer the Central Registry to identify those who are injured
- Distribute resources through the Trust Fund, and
- Advocate for improvements in statewide services.

Our Vision

A Georgia where people with traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries are valued, have equal opportunity and real choices.

Our Approach

Through the Central Registry: We Identify

The Central Registry for Traumatic Brain & Spinal Injuries is the only accurate, centralized source of data on Georgians with traumatic injuries. The Commission took on the administration of the Central Registry in 2004; in that year alone, more than 45,000 new cases of traumatic injuries were identified, and the number rose to 58,216 new cases in 2008—compared with only 2,410 cases identified in 2003 under the previous administrators. The Commission continues to correct this severe undercount by dedicating ongoing efforts to improving the accuracy of the Central Registry. In doing so, we can:

- Provide better information about resources to the newly injured.
- Increase access to and awareness of the Trust Fund.
- Make strategic policy recommendations to improve services for Georgians who have been injured.
- Seek federal and private grant funding.
- Partner with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to improve research and prevention initiatives.
- Be better equipped in long-range planning for the disbursement of Trust Fund dollars

We Have Popular Support

In November 1998, Georgia voters overwhelmingly approved (by 73%) a constitutional amendment to create a Trust Fund for brain and spinal injuries, paid for by a surcharge on drunk driving fines. This landmark legislation won by a margin of greater than 2-to-1.

"The spirit of this legislation was that it would provide for things that are not compensated for by other payers—private insurance, Medicaid, Medicare—or that were provided for only to a limited extent. ... It was meant to fill the gaps in the system where there was no one else providing resources."

—David Goudelock, former President of the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund Coalition and current Chairman of the Board of the Brain Injury Association of Georgia.

We are Guided by Those with First-hand Knowledge

The idea of the Trust Fund and the advocacy efforts on behalf of the founding legislation was driven by people with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and spinal cord injury (SCI). Because of their first-hand experiences, they knew what was most important for people with traumatic injuries—and what was missing in the range of services and resources available. They dreamed of an agency that understood the lifelong needs of people with traumatic injuries and that was committed to supporting injured individuals throughout life – not just in the critical moments after the injury occurs.

Through the Trust Fund: We Assist

The purpose of the Brain & Spinal Injury Trust Fund, established in 1998 and funded by a 10% surcharge on DUI fines, is to provide financial assistance to people with TBI and/or SCI once they've exhausted all other payment options for the assistance they need to live fully inclusive, independent lives. Since 2003, the Commission has awarded \$15 million to more than 3,000 Georgians with traumatic injuries.

The Trust Fund's staff evaluates applications on a rolling basis, recommending recipients based on need and eligibility. They also provide highly skilled direct client services, assisting individuals with TBI and SCI through the application process. Seventy-five percent of the Trust Fund's total expenses for FY2010 are budgeted for grants, and no other state agency is dedicated and trained to do this kind of work.

The Governor approves all Trust Fund recommendations before an award is made, and once recipients have received an award, they are encouraged to reciprocate by participating in advocacy and stewardship for others with traumatic injuries.

As the Lead Agency: We Advocate

As Georgia's Lead Agency on Traumatic Injuries, we have been designated with the primary authority and responsibility for coordinating brain injury services in the state of Georgia. Since accepting this designation from the Department of Community Health in 2003, we have expanded the role to include services for spinal cord injuries as well, in order to reflect our overall mission to assist both people with TBI and people with SCI.

While a designated Lead Agency usually does not provide all the services that individuals with TBI or SCI may receive from state government, the agency may provide leadership within the state to coordinate the system of service delivery.

The Commission understands that being the Lead Agency in Georgia will help it to:

- Make sure that the Brain and Spinal Injury Trust Fund is distributed effectively. As the Lead Agency, the Commission will work to improve coordination of services for Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal injuries, thereby making sure that the Trust Fund dollars are maximized and used where they are needed most.
- Fulfill its responsibility to develop public policy changes that will improve coordination of state services. This responsibility is set out in the Commission's originating statute and in its mission statement.

To learn more about the Trust Fund, find additional information on TBI and SCI, and read about important legislative issues and upcoming initiatives for people with traumatic injuries, visit the Commission's Web site at www.bsitf.state.ga.us.

"There were many people that were involved in this at the early stages who were brain or spinal cord injured, and they knew the limitations of insurance and Medicare and Medicaid, and although they did get hospital care when they were initially injured, they received nothing—there was nothing out there for anyone—to make them successful living with a brain or spinal cord injury. Basically, that's what this is all about—it's about living with brain or spinal cord injury. It's not the initial period following an injury; it's life—so it's a big difference."

—Rocky Rothrock, Founding
Commission member; brain injury
survivor

"People usually get their hospital bills paid for. That's not the problem. It's after—the life issues you're left with—that are the problem. That's what the Trust Fund originally—the original members—agreed was what we wanted."

—Rachel Jones, Founding
Commission member; brain injury
survivor

Additionally, more than half of the people who serve on the Commission must have a brain or spinal cord injury or be a family member of a person with an injury. Other members are specialists in the field, or work with organizations that provide services to people with traumatic injuries. Their collective knowledge and experiences governs our day-to-day decisions, guides our recommendations for award distributions, and informs our public policy agenda.

We Connect People to Their Communities

Georgians with traumatic brain and spinal injuries deserve lives of independence and inclusion, lives rich with vision and possibilities. Trust Fund awards assist individuals with injuries in reaching these goals.

Trust Fund awards change lives.