

Saving Lives Through Training: How Discovery Living Inc. Improved Staff Preparedness with the Fatal Five Training

Discovery Living Inc., a Cedar Rapids-based provider agency serving 150+ adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), used a University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) Education, Research, and Service mini-grant to deliver Fatal Five eLearning training. Staff gained practical tools to recognize and prevent the five leading preventable causes of death in people with IDD. Survey results show a high satisfaction rating, highly engaging material, and measurable increases in staff confidence and preparedness.



Challenge

- People with IDD face higher rates of preventable health problems and premature death.
- The most common conditions associated with death (aspiration, dehydration, bowel obstruction, seizures, and infection, plus gastroesophageal reflux disease) are often overlooked or mismanaged.
- Discovery Living leadership wanted a structured way to educate all staff, but needed external support to implement it.



Goals

- Provide staff with robust education on the Fatal Five.
- Equip employees with skills to spot early signs, seek timely medical attention, and prevent crises.
- Reduce reliance on emergency interventions and prevent hospitalizations.

Results & Impact

Collectively, this brought an increase in staff discussions about the Fatal Five and prompted proactive follow-ups with supporters and medical providers for early intervention. As a result, this training increased direct support professionals' confidence and skills in addressing the Fatal Five.

Overall course rating:

**4.15 out of
5 stars**



rated training
"very" or "highly
relevant"



reported being
better prepared to
recognize Fatal Five
conditions



reported being
better prepared to
prevent Fatal Five
conditions



were able to
immediately apply
knowledge on the
job



would recommend
the training to
others

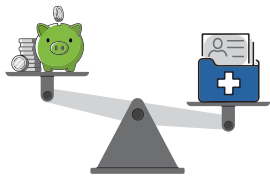
Measurable Health & Cost Outcomes

(1 Year Post-Training)

One year after implementing Fatal Five training, Discovery Living experienced substantial reductions in emergency and urgent care utilization, translating into meaningful healthcare and staffing cost savings.

In 2025, combined emergency department and urgent care visits declined by **37%**, from 254 visits to 159. Even after adjusting for high utilizers, visits decreased by **33%**, demonstrating sustained system-wide improvement.

Based on national cost estimates, this reduction represents:



\$274,410

Estimated Medical
Cost Savings



630+ HOURS

Staff Time Redirected
to Proactive Support



\$15,237

Staffing Overtime
Savings

These findings demonstrate that Fatal Five training not only improves staff preparedness, but also delivers measurable financial and operational value.

Conclusion

Discovery Living demonstrated that targeted Fatal Five training can empower staff to recognize preventable crises early, improve health outcomes, and reduce avoidable medical utilization. In addition to strengthening staff confidence and clinical awareness, the program produced measurable reductions in emergency visits and healthcare costs, demonstrating both quality-of-life and organizational sustainability benefits.



"The modules are short and easy to understand."



"I didn't know that much about aspiration."



"I love the videos, knowledge checks, and scenarios."



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