

Policy Will Be a Major Focus

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A new director will come to the Center for Persons with Disabilities at the end of January 2017. Dr. Matthew Wappett approaches his new job with experience in leadership, policymaking, program-building and providing services to people with disabilities in the West. "I'm a pretty collaborative leader," he said in an interview earlier this month. "I like to work with what we've got." His duties at Utah State University will be surrounded by change. The inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump will likely have an effect on services nationwide. The health care and insurance systems will likely change, too, and all of that will affect people with disabilities. Regardless of any changes to programs, Wappett said it will be important to safeguard services to people with disabilities, whether they are funded by federal, state or private programs. "If the federal role shrinks, people need to continue receiving the services that they need and that their families need to live full, productive lives," he said. With those issues in mind, Wappett expects policy to be a major focus for the CPD in the coming years. "We want to be the center of expertise in disability to policymakers and the community," he said. He will focus on increasing the CPD's profile, communicating its value to the public. Disability services in Utah are like those in other western states, with a distinct rural/urban divide. People in cities have access to services, while those in remote areas may struggle to get them. "That is a real issue regarding service delivery and comprehensive supports," he said. The CPD faces change on a smaller scale, too. A new human services building is under construction on campus, and it will ultimately house many of the CPD programs. When it is complete, some CPD programs that are currently,

physically located far from the building will move much closer to the rest of the CPD. Wappett said he would like to see a more cohesive culture, organization-wide. "It will be a collaborative process, and it will take a while," he said. Wappett's background in disability includes a stint as an associate director of the Center on Disabilities and Human Development at the University of Idaho. He also founded and directed the interdisciplinary studies program there. Currently he co-directs the Confucius Institute at the U of I—an opportunity that came partly because he speaks Chinese. But while he has accomplished a lot at that program, he misses disability and looks forward to returning to it. Assistive technology is an important issue to him; he hopes the CPD can remain engaged in "keeping abreast of technology, and figuring out innovative ways to keep people with disabilities involved in society." Postsecondary education and employment for students with disabilities are also big issues for him. It's not just transition, he said; it's what comes beyond it. Dr. Wappett begins as the new CPD director on January 25.