By Connie Pehrson

At least 3.2 million Americans have a long-term or lifelong need for help to perform activities of daily living as a result of a traumatic brain injury. Each year, an estimated 1.7 million people sustain a TBI. These individuals and their families are often faced with inadequate or unavailable TBI services and supports. The Traumatic Brain Injury Act, originally passed by Congress in 1996 and reauthorized in 2008, forced a nationwide recognition of the need to improve state TBI service systems. The federal Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau has provided grant funding for states to improve access to health and other services for individuals with TBI and their families. In Utah, matching funds for these grants have been contributed by several state agencies, including the Department of Health, Division of Aging and Adult Services, Juvenile Justice Services, Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, Bureau of Children with Special Health Care Needs, Division of Child and Family Services, and the Division of Services for People with Disabilities. The Center for Persons with Disabilities has participated on these grants since 2001. The latest grant was funded in April of this year. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH), Utah Brain Injury Council (UBIC), and the Coordinating Council for People with Disabilities (CCPD) will work together to administer this grant over the next four years. A State TBI Coordinator, Sue Dubois, former Community TBI Coordinator for northern Utah, has been hired to coordinate the statewide efforts. The Partnership grant has three primary goals: 1) To foster improvement in the TBI service delivery system in Utah, 2) Assure access to coordinated community services and supports for young children (ages birth-4) with TBI, and 3) Assure access to coordinated community services for Service members and veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom who have TBI. Other high risk groups for incurring a TBI that are targeted in the grant include Hispanic/Latino and Native American populations. “Utah continues to face many challenges ensuring ongoing access to TBI services for the populations this grant will cover,” said Dr. David Sundwall, UDOH Executive Director. “It is an absolute necessity for state and community agencies to identify individuals with TBI and know where to send them and their families for help.” Young children are often not identified as having TBI as easily as adults, and services are not appropriately designed. This grant will help to increase the awareness of TBI in infants and toddlers, as well as to identify ways to support families of children with TBI. It’s been determined that TBI rates vary by age and sex, and that children aged 0 to 4 years who sustain a TBI may have their injury go undetected. This is significant in Utah, where the population of children is significantly higher than other states. Ginger Payant, TBI Community Coordinator at the CPD, shared they are currently developing a needs assessment for service providers and families of children with traumatic brain injuries that will be piloted with the Up to 3 Early Intervention program at the CPD. It will help them better understand and identify the needs and resources of young children with TBIs and their families, and the agencies serving them. An early childhood work group has been organized to gather information from parents and providers regarding their awareness of the symptoms of TBI and assess what interventions are currently being used. TBIs have become the signature wound sustained by veterans serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Shock waves from bombs can pass through helmets and through the brain. Secondary trauma can occur when soldiers are thrown up against vehicles or walls, shaking the brain again. Officially, the military says about 150,000 soldiers have suffered some form of brain injury since the wars began. The Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center at Walter Reed Medical Center estimates that number to be closer to 190,000 since the year 2000. Returning veterans need a comprehensive variety of rehabilitation programs and support of all available resources in the community to help them successfully reintegrate back into society. Many veterans in rural and remote areas cannot access services as easily. The TBI Grant staff will conduct needs assessments to better understand and identify the needs and current resources available to veterans and their families in Utah. After identifying and reviewing best practices, they will develop educational guides and training.
materials to address the issues that face veterans with TBIs. The Utah TBI Implementation Partnership Grant will improve the TBI service delivery system in Utah and develop statewide capabilities to address family and person-directed resources for individuals with TBI and their families.