



State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

1 WEST WILSON STREET,
ROOM 551
POST OFFICE BOX 2659
MADISON, WI 53701-2659
Telephone: 608-266-9354
Website: dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd

February 17, 2021

The Honorable Tony Evers
115 E. Capitol Dr. # 1
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers,

Following is the 2020 Annual Report of the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD). In a year rife with challenges, the GCPD was able to respond with a new level of effectiveness. This was made possible by the efforts of Committee members together with the significant engagement of the staff from both the Governor's and Lt. Governor's offices. We are also very grateful for the work of the DHS liaison staff, without whom much of what is reported would have been far more difficult or altogether impossible.

The report is divided into three sections: Structure and Function; Activities; and Membership. All three sections reflect steps we have taken to improve efficiency and strengthen the overall impact of the Committee. We look forward to another year of robust activity in 2021.\

Respectfully,

David Morstad, Chair
Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

CC: GCPD Members and Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes



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Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) Annual Report 2020

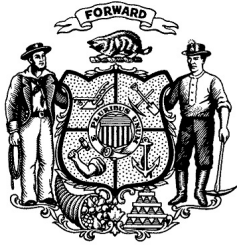
The GCPD is dedicated to enhancing the health and well-being of Wisconsin citizens who have disabilities. As a Committee of Governor-appointed volunteers with cross-disability council representation (Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Council on Physical Disabilities, Statutory Council on Blindness), GCPD serves to advise the Governor, state agencies, and the state legislature on issues of concern for people who have disabilities.

This report serves as an overview of activity and accomplishments of GCPD during the 2020 calendar year.

GCPD has been appreciative of the collaboration and partnership with the Governor's and Lieutenant Governor's offices over the past year.

Structure and Function

- Early in 2020, GCPD found that its established subcommittees (Employment, Transportation, Long-Term Support, and Membership) and subcommittee structure faced challenges on a number of fronts. Scheduling meetings that members could attend, meeting open meeting requirements, and creating reasonable expectations of DHS support staff were all complicated by the extreme change in focus as the state and country faced the challenge of the pandemic. The past year has provided the opportunity to reexamine the way in which subcommittees and ad-hoc work groups can be utilized more effectively by GCPD.
- In March, per Executive Order 72, declaring a public health emergency in the State of Wisconsin, GCPD's regularly scheduled quarterly meeting was changed from an in-person meeting to a virtual only meeting via Zoom. All subsequent GCPD meetings were held virtually in 2020.
- GCPD made an operational shift in its functioning during its June quarterly meeting. It had become apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic was having a disproportionately negative effect on people with disabilities and that the established schedule and work patterns of the GCPD were inadequate to addressing these emerging issues. The decision was made to increase the meeting frequency of the full Committee and move from quarterly meetings to bi-monthly meetings, and to direct the Executive Committee to meet on a weekly basis. These changes made it possible for the Committee to dramatically increase its output and ability to rapidly respond to emerging policy issues.



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- As we made the transition to virtual meetings, there was a need to maximize the efficiency of our bi-monthly meeting time. We created a reporting format (Attachment 1) for Liaisons and constituent councils with the requirement that reports be submitted two weeks in advance of the meeting for review by members.
- The steps taken by the GCPD to accelerate its work during the COVID-19 crisis have served to highlight necessary changes to its by-laws and the accompanying Roles and Responsibilities of GCPD members. In December 2020, GCPD approved a Roles and Responsibilities document (Attachment 2). Sections on avoidance of conflict of interest, meeting preparation, and virtual attendance were strengthened. In addition, an ad-hoc workgroup was appointed to begin a review recommended changes to GCPD's by-laws. Action on this will take place in the coming year (2021).

Activities

- In January 2020, the GCPD sent a letter to the Governor's Office encouraging the establishment of an Inter-Agency Council on Transportation Coordination (Attachment 3). This was in response to the concerns expressed by people with disabilities and older adults across Wisconsin related to access and affordability of transportation being amongst their top priority concerns.
- In February 2020, GCPD crafted a letter to the Governor's Office regarding the State Use Program (Attachment 4). Created by legislature in 1989, the program provides for non-competitive state contracts for certain goods and services. It is intended to encourage employment for people with significant disabilities, though it has been limited to non-profit "work centers" (sometimes referred to as sheltered workshops). After a long review of the programs functioning, GCPD made recommendations that included:
 - Create representation on the State Use Board that would more effectively and efficiently align and direct its work. This would include but is not limited to representation by people with disabilities working in those environments, representation from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and representation from a private competitive employer that employs people with significant disabilities in their workforce;



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- Lower the requirement that 75% of the workforce be people who have significant disabilities which, by definition, prevents an integrated work environment;
 - Require that individuals working in State Use Program be paid at least minimum wage; and
 - Review state policy and make non-legislative changes necessary to improve the function of the State Use Board, e.g., appointment of an individual with a disability to the board and following established open meeting requirements.
- In June 2020, GCPD developed and distributed Food Access Survey to measure food insecurity of people with disabilities during the pandemic (Attachment 5). The survey was sent to individuals with disabilities and to agencies that serve people with disabilities. Of the individual serve respondents (81%) were individuals with disabilities and they represented 44 counties. Three main reasons people cited they did not have access to food were: being high-risk and could not go to grocery store (58%); Not having access to transportation (34%); and restaurants I usually go to are closed (27%). GCPD then crafted a press release detailing the findings from these Food Access Surveys.
 - Also in June 2020, GCPD was pleased to participate in a call convened by T.R. Williams, Deputy Outreach Director for the Office of Governor Tony Evers, for the purpose of Engaging Voices in the Disability Community. The meeting provided an opportunity to emphasize the unique position of the GCPD with respect to its ability to:
 - Be a sounding board that can draft or evaluate recommendations, policies, executive orders, state legislation, and programs impacting people with disabilities;
 - Gather information and data on emerging issues;
 - Convene stakeholders to work toward shared goals and outcomes to improve the lives of people with disabilities; and



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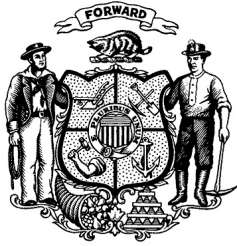
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- Communicate with the appointed disability councils and state agencies through lines of communication are already established.
- Following the meeting, the GCPD sent a letter to Deputy Outreach Director, T.R. Williams, thanking her for convening the meeting and seeking further engagement. We emphasized the GCPD could assist with gathering information, convening stakeholders, and gathering data through lines of communication that were already established (Attachment 6).
- In July 2020, recognizing the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), GCPD drafted a proclamation and sent it to the Governor's Office for consideration (Attachment 7). In addition, GCPD released a press statement (Attachment 8) highlighting the positive changes created by ADA and calling for a renewed commitment to further realizing the vision and work to be done. GCPD also created an online survey portal, asking people with disabilities to share their own life experiences before and following the passage of ADA.
- In July 2020, the GCPD responded to a request for public comment from the Wisconsin Caregiver Taskforce relative to a number of policy recommendations. A summary of those comments is attached (Attachment 9).
- On August 18, 2020, the GCPD issued a press release on the Unequal Effect of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities. The press release highlighted gaps in our current service delivery system, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic (Attachment 10).
- In October 2020, GCPD sent a letter to the Governor's Office about the impact no visitor policies were having on people with disabilities during the pandemic (Attachment 11). The letter recommended that a disability support person (paid or unpaid) be recognized as a reasonable accommodation during medical evaluation and treatment and that this be communicated to Wisconsin healthcare providers. This would serve as an important first step in providing point-of-service support and advocacy.



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- In November 2020, following additional reports of the disparate effect of COVID-19 on people with disabilities, and a review of possible policy recommendations, GCPD crafted a letter to the Governor's Office (Attachment 12) providing brief background and specific policy recommendations on eight specific issues:
 - Disability Support Persons accompany people with disabilities to medical treatments;
 - Access to COVID-19 testing;
 - Testing and vaccinations for individuals who are homebound;
 - Public Health Orders and information in accessible formats;
 - Health and safety of individuals with dementia;
 - Caregiver shortages;
 - Telehealth and Broadband Access; and
 - Representation of people with disabilities on State Medical Advisory Committee.



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Membership

The members listed below served on GCPD during calendar year 2020.

Member's Name	Member's Role
David Morstad	Chair, Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Margaret Kristan	Vice-Chair, Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Nancy Leipzig	Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Pearl Fessenden	Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Ben Barrett	Executive Committee Member, Representative from the Wisconsin Council on Physical Disabilities (with a disability)
Evelyn Azbell	Member-at-Large
Julie Blasky	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Gail Bovy	Representative from the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities
Kimberlee Coronado	Representative from the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health
John Hartman	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Dan Idzikowski	Member-at-Large
Daniel Laatsch	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Ramsey Lee	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Fred Ludwig	Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes, Ex-Officio Member
Tom O'Connor	Representative from the Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (with a disability)
John Olson	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Sandy Popp	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Maureen Ryan	Member-at-Large
Rhonda Staats	Representative from the Statutory Council on Blindness (with a disability)
Vacant	Member-at-Large
Vacant	Representative from the State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

- For several years, GCPD has struggled to have representation by two important state councils, the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health and the State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse. In August and September, the GCPD Chair attended these councils regular meetings, provided an update on GCPD's recent work, and emphasized how important it was to have the voices of those two councils at GCPD. As of the end of 2020, GCPD was still without representation



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from these councils. This will be part of GCPD's 2021 work plan to fill the vacancies in those important positions.

- GCPD recognizes the need to have a more diverse membership that better reflects the ethnic and cultural composition of the State's population and is exploring strategies to attract people of color and diverse ethnic backgrounds to be appointed to GCPD. In addition, GCPD recognizes the need to recruit and attract younger people with disabilities to be appointed to GCPD.
- GCPD was able to fill two vacancies on the Committee this year, welcoming Evelyn Azbell and Julie Blasky as Members-at-Large.
- As noted, we have tried without success to engage representation from WCMH and SCAODA and we will begin pursuing other avenues to include these important voice represented on GCPD.
- The bi-annual election of three members with disabilities to the GCPD Executive Committee was deferred until the February 2021 bi-monthly meeting.



Attachment 1

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Council and Liaison Report for Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD)

Notes:

- This will help to ensure that GCPD complies with open meeting and accessibility requirements we requesting the following of Committee Council and Liaison members:
 - Council Representatives and Liaisons are expected to submit this report form by the due date established by the DHS staff support person to GCPD. Council and Liaisons report will be due approximately 2 weeks prior to the GCPD Bi-Monthly meeting. If the report is not submitted by the due date, the report may be held over for a subsequent GCPD meeting.
 - Council Representatives and Liaisons may share information about other issues that may be of general interest to the GCPD. These materials must be provided to the DHS staff support person by the due date. Materials not provided by the due date may be held over for a subsequent meeting.
 - Council Representatives and Liaisons are discouraged from separately emailing or otherwise distributing documents to GCPD members as GCPD wants to ensure all documents are accessible prior to them being sent to GCPD membership.
- Thank you for following this protocol.

Date Submitting Report (month/year): Click or tap here to enter text.

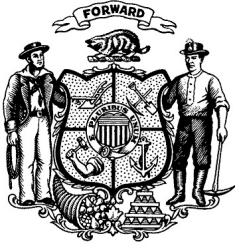
Name of Person Submitting Report: Click or tap here to enter text.

Council or Organization Your Represent: Click or tap here to enter text.

Please provide a summary of any key policy issues under consideration by the Council or Organization you represent that are relevant to GCPD (please attach any supporting documents to this report form). Click or tap here to enter text.

Please indicate what GCPD is being asked to do regarding the key policy issue(s) described in this report. Click or tap here to enter text.

Is there a specific action you are requesting GCPD to take? If so by when? Click or tap here to enter text.



Attachment 2

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Roles and Responsibilities: Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities Council (GCPD) Members

Individuals who are appointed to GCPD must have a personal commitment to enhancing the health and general well-being of Wisconsin citizens who have disabilities. While this document predominately addresses roles and responsibilities regarding meetings, members must recognize that the commitment includes activity outside of meetings including responding to communications related to GCPD business and following through with assignments and additional duties between meetings.

Members may only represent GCPD (at other functions, in any communication, social media, etc.) when that member has authority to do so from the full committee or the Executive Committee. Members may not use their membership status for personal gain. Members acting on GCPD business must adhere to Wisconsin State Statute Chapter 19 General Duties of Public Officials.

- **General**

- Members are appointed to serve at the pleasure of the Governor.
- Members are required to fulfill the roles and responsibilities outlined in this document during their membership on GCPD.
- If, for any reason, a member is unable to serve, they must submit a letter of resignation to the Governor with a copy to the GCPD Chairperson. The letter does not need to include the reason as to why the member cannot continue to serve, however, the letter does need to include an effective date of resignation from GCPD.
- GCPD may recommend to the Governor that a member be removed with a two-thirds (66%) majority vote of those members present at a regularly-scheduled quarterly meeting.
- GCPD Executive Committee may grant a leave of absence to any member.



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- **Member Responsibilities**

- **Meeting Attendance**

- GCPD has a minimum of four full committee meetings annually. GCPD members are required to attend meetings in person or via telecommunications unless they request to be excused from the meeting for reasonable cause.
 - If a member cannot attend a meeting, the member should email or call the GCPD Chairperson with an explanation as to why they are unable to attend the meeting.
 - A Committee member absent from two consecutive GCPD meetings will receive a formal communication from the Chairperson concerning the member's desire and ability to remain on the Committee.
 - The missing of three consecutive meetings without being excused (or due cause) will be construed as a de facto resignation.

- **Meeting Preparation/Participation**

- **Preparation**

- Members are required to prepare for GCPD and sub-committee meetings by reviewing the meeting materials in advance.
- If a member has a topic or proposal they would like the Committee to consider, those items should be sent to the GCPD Chairperson for consideration by the Executive Committee. These topics or proposals may be added to a GCPD full committee for membership review.



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- Requests for items to be included on the meeting agenda by members shall be submitted to the Chairperson no less than six weeks prior to the regularly scheduled meeting. Items sent to the Committee Chairperson less than six weeks prior will be considered for inclusion at the next meeting. Members should submit items for consideration that are appropriate for GCPD and do not serve to benefit a member's personal interests or business interests.
- **Participation**
 - Members are expected to fully participate in meetings by providing feedback, commenting, and voting when applicable.
 - Members may make requests for reasonable accommodations in order to participate in meetings.
 - In some cases, participation requires the ability to participate "virtually" through telecommunications (phone and/or video). Members must have the flexibility to participate in meetings other than in-person which has become more important during times of reducing spread of disease and infection.
 - Members should practice proper etiquette when participating through telecommunication (such as muting phone when not speaking, appropriate use of video functions, etc.). Members should announce their name before they provide comment at meetings



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- **Conflict of Interest**

- Many GCPD members serve various roles in professional and volunteer capacity in their community or statewide. GCPD welcomes information and feedback from members on issues the GCPD is addressing based upon a member's expertise or experience. However, members should recognize when they may not be able to vote or provide information if it may influence the decision of the GCPD or result in financial or personal gains (e.g., GCPD purchasing a service from a business owned by a member or a decision made by GCPD positively or negatively impacting another council on which the member serves).
- At any time a member has cause to believe there is a conflict of interest, the member should abstain from voting and state they have a conflict of interest.
- If a Committee member is unsure if there is a conflict of interest, they should bring the issue to the Chairperson or the full committee. Whether a conflict exists shall be decided by a majority vote of all Committee members present.



Attachment 3

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State of Wisconsin Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

Telephone: 608-266-9354
Fax: 608-267-3203
Website: <https://gcpd.wisconsin.gov/>

January 13, 2020

Hon. Tony Evers
Governor, State of Wisconsin
115 East State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

Re: Inter-Agency Council on Transportation Coordination
Dear Governor Evers,

We write to encourage you to convene a Transportation Coordination Council.

In 2005, then Governor Jim Doyle brought together representatives from the Wisconsin Departments of Transportation, Health Services, Workforce Development, Veterans Affairs, and the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance to consider ways that Wisconsin can better coordinate the variety of public funding sources and programs so that transportation providers and stakeholders can work together to increase cost-effectiveness, capacity, quality, and accessibility of services. This Interagency Council on Transportation Coordination (ICTC) was charged with four tasks:

- Create a state level coordination council;
- Conduct a statewide transportation assessment;
- Develop an action plan for human service transportation coordination; and
- Conduct an inventory of transportation systems.

In its report, which we have attached with this letter, the ICTC recommended that the Governor follow the Wisconsin Model of Coordination that it developed. We recall here the ICTC's primary recommendation to follow and strengthen this Model by reconvening this coordinating council.

The Model's first strategy, strengthening ICTC as the lead entity for statewide coordination efforts, is necessary for further development of policies to promote and institutionalize transportation coordination in Wisconsin. With a better structure and a clear mandate, ICTC can develop policy proposals, legislative initiatives, and technical tools fulfilling the ideal of transportation coordination: Meeting more needs by using existing resources more efficiently.

- *Report of the Inter-Agency Council on Transportation Coordination (ICTC) to Governor Jim Doyle (October 27, 2008), p. iii*

Transportation access and affordability are consistently one of the most important concerns expressed by people with disabilities and older adults across the state. It is the linchpin for maintaining and advancing Wisconsin's progress in providing people with disabilities and older adults an engaging life in their community. All our efforts to advance long term care options, end isolation, and promote community integrated employment are limited or frustrated without access to transportation that meets the needs and recognizes the choices of our residents.

gcpd.wisconsin.gov



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While we do not abandon the call for additional public funding for transportation to get people where they want to go, we strongly believe that existing resources can be better coordinated and promoted to increase access to transportation options – particularly for those most in need of transportation support.

As your Committee for People with Disabilities, we are charged to provide you with advice about policy options that will advance the interests of Wisconsinites with all disabilities. The Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities includes official representation from every major disability group – including intellectual and developmental, physical, deaf and hard of hearing, blind, mental illness, and addiction. The Governor's Committee is dedicated to enhancing the health and general well-being of people of all ages with disabilities in Wisconsin.

Together, we urge you to take this important step to advance transportation coordination, access, and affordability for all Wisconsinites, particularly people with disabilities and older adults. We call upon you to issue an Executive Order that convenes a Transportation Coordination Council, consisting of Secretaries or their designees from the Departments listed above and adding representatives from the Departments of Administration, Safety and Professional Services, and Public Instruction, the Governor's Council for People with Disabilities, the State Independent Living Council, the Wisconsin Aging Advisory Council, and the Association of Wisconsin Regional Planning Commissions. In addition, we specifically ask that a person with disabilities and an older adult who utilize a publicly supported transportation program be included on this Council.

We respectfully request that your Order require department secretaries to promote coordination within and between their departments, that the Council convene regular periodic meetings chaired by a member of your staff and have dedicated administrative support. We also suggest that the Council create a Stakeholder Advisory Committee consisting of interested transportation providers, users and stakeholders and charge the Council with making policy recommendations, including model regulation and legislation, to implement the Wisconsin Model of Transportation Coordination.

Convening a Transportation Coordination Council is another way you can help to end divisiveness and create a shared vision for the direction of our state's transportation systems for the common good. We look forward to learning of your action in response to our recommendation. Please reach out to us directly for more information on this important policy priority.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Morstad".

THE GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

BY: David Morstad, Chair



Attachment 4

State of Wisconsin **Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities**

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February 28, 2020

The Honorable Tony Evers
115 E. Capitol Dr. # 1
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers,

This letter is to provide an update on the work of the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) specifically relative to Wisconsin's State Use Program.

The GCPD was established per Wisconsin Statute 14.019 and is dedicated to enhancing the health and general well-being of people of all ages with disabilities in Wisconsin. The GCPD consults with and advises the Governor and state agencies on legislation, programs, policies and issues affecting people with disabilities in all aspects of our society.

The State Use Program

Wisconsin's State Use Program was created by legislature in 1989 and is administered by a Board under the auspices of the Department of Administration. The program provides for non-competitive state contracts for certain goods and services and, since it is intended to encourage employment for people with significant disabilities, has been limited to nonprofit "work centers" founded to support people with disabilities. These work centers must (1) produce goods and services to specifications, be produced in a timely manner, and be made available at a fair price; and (2) the work centers must be comprised of at least 75% of workers who have significant disabilities.

Committee Process

The GCPD and its related subcommittee has been in discussion regarding the State Use Program for nearly two years and has noted concerns in a number of areas. Of particular note, there is no current requirement that people with disabilities have any direct representation on the State Use Board. The absence of a voice by the very people affected by this program is inconsistent with current trends in disability inclusion as well as a restriction of basic human rights. In addition, we do not believe the State Use Board is in compliance with current requirements regarding open



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meetings in Wisconsin and we would respectfully request a review of the Board's procedures relative to the transparency of its proceedings.

GCPD Recommendations

The guiding principles that both frame our concerns and direct our recommendations include providing more opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities to work in competitive jobs in the private labor force, increasing opportunities for gainful employment among youth and adults with significant disabilities, and ensuring that all employees participating in the State Use Program enjoy equal protection of the law and are fairly treated. There is also an opportunity to align the State Use Program with current federal and state policy relative to employment, and update language to reflect contemporary understanding of disability and support the dignity of all people.

The State Use Program is intended to encourage employment for people with significant disabilities, but within its current structure does little to accomplish the spirit or intent of the law and is not consistent with contemporary trends or current Wisconsin Department of Health Services policy to encourage competitive integrated employment. The GCPD holds the opinion that Wisconsin's State Use Program is generally archaic and we would make the following recommendations.

1. That statutory changes be pursued that would:
 - Create representation on the State Use Board that would more effectively and efficiently align and direct its work. This would include but is not be limited to representation by people with disabilities working in those environments, representation from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and representation from a private competitive employer that employs people with significant disabilities in their workforce.
 - Lower the requirement that 75% of the workforce be people who have significant disabilities, a situation that by definition prevents an integrated work environment.
 - Require that individuals working in State Use Program be paid at least minimum wage, a most basic step toward meaningful employment.
2. That the Department of Administration review state policy and make non-legislative changes necessary to improve the function of the State Use Board, e.g., appointment of an individual with a disability to the board and following established open meeting requirements.



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The GCPD has been very encouraged by the renewed partnership with the Governor and Lt. Governor's office. We also thank the Lt. Governor Office for appointing an ex-officio member to GCPD. We would be pleased to discuss these recommendations with your staff at our upcoming quarterly meeting on March 18, 2020 at the Hilton Monona Terrace in Madison or at another convenient time.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these recommendations. Please contact me if you have any questions or need further information. I can be reached at david.morstad@gmail.com or (920) 248-9210.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Morstad".

David Morstad, Chair
Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

cc: Lieutenant Governor, Mandela Barnes
Secretary Department of Administration, Joel Brennan
Secretary Department of Health Services, Andrea Palm
Secretary Department of Workforce Development, Caleb Frostman

Attachment 5

Food Access Surveys

BUREAU OF AGING AND DISABILITY RESOURCES,
OFFICE FOR PHYSICAL DISABILITIES AND INDEPENDENT LIVING AND
GOVERNORS COMMITTEE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
JULY 2020

Office for Physical Disabilities and Independent Living Overview

- Provides Staff Support to Governor Appointed Disability Councils
 - Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities
 - Wisconsin Council on Physical Disabilities
 - Assistive Technology Advisory Council
 - Independent Living Council of Wisconsin
- Administers and Oversees Programs
 - WisTech Program (State Assistive Technology Program)
 - iCanConnect (National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program)
 - Independent Living Services

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities Overview

In 1948, a Governor's Committee was established with one goal: to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The group's mission was broadened in 1976 to cover many aspects of disability in Wisconsin and became the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD). Unlike other disability councils in state government, the focus of the Governor's Committee includes all disabilities and six of its members represent specific disability constituencies.

GCPD is charged with the following duties:

- Advise the Governor and state agencies on problems faced by people with disabilities.
- Review legislation affecting people with disabilities.
- Promote effective operation of publicly-administered or supported programs serving people with disabilities.
- Promote the collection, dissemination and incorporation of adequate information about people with disabilities for purposes of public planning at all levels of government.
- Promote public awareness of the needs and abilities of people with disabilities.
- Encourage the effective involvement of people with disabilities in government.

Development of Food Access Surveys

- Consumer and agency inquiries have been received in our office during the pandemic related to people not having access to food or nutrition services.
- Consumer councils were also receiving inquiries related to food access.
- There was a need to get real data versus individual stories to assess scope of this issue.
- OPDIL/GCPD sent the survey out June 1, 2020.
- In one week, 141 individuals responded and 4 agencies.
 - After initial influx of responses the Individual Survey and Agency Survey were left open for response through June 30, 2020.

Individual Survey Findings

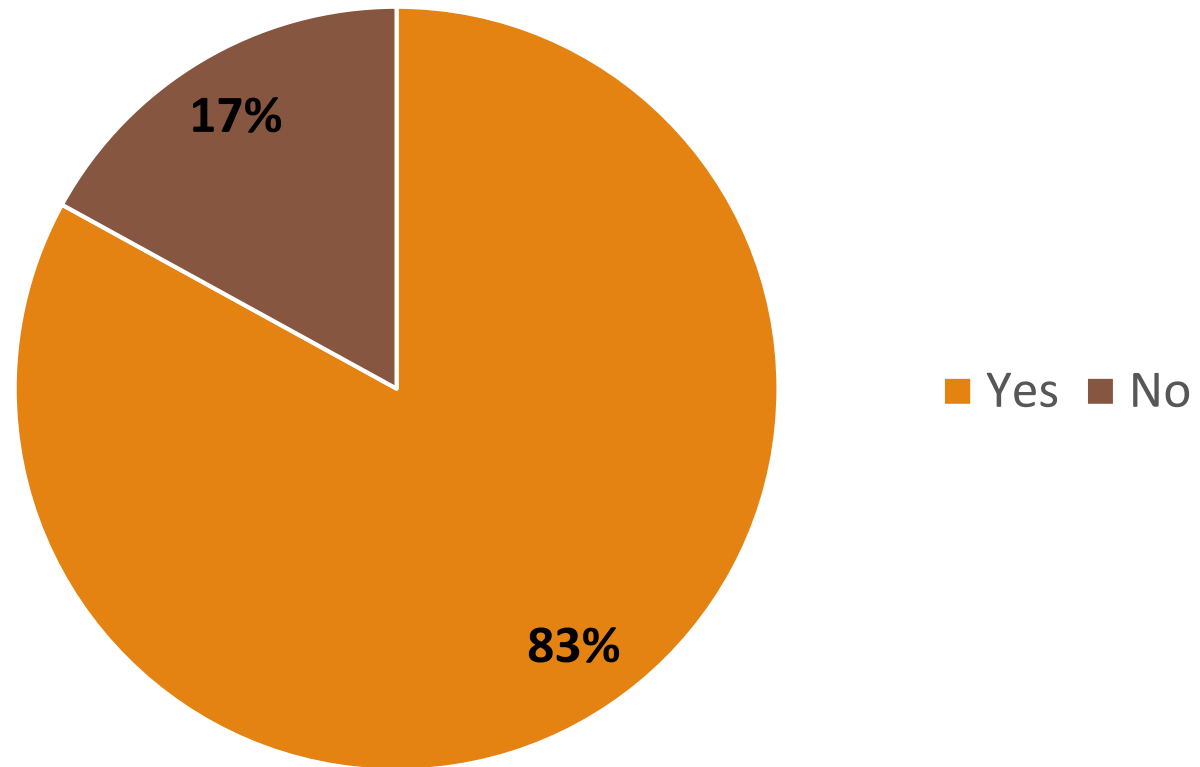
- Received 151 individual responses.
- People from 44 counties responded.
- Majority of survey respondents were in the 18-25 years old age range.
- 81% of survey respondents have a disability, so the survey reached its intended audience.
- 39% of survey respondents stated that they have experienced problems getting food during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Three main reasons people cited they did not have access to food were: being high-risk and could not go to grocery store (58%); Not having access to transportation (34%); and restaurants I usually go to are closed (27%).
- Of those individuals who have experienced issues accessing food, when asked who they contacted for help 72% stated a family member. The second highest rated resource was other (29%).

Individual Survey Findings (cont.)

- Only 16% had reported ever eating at a congregate meal site.
- 3% of survey respondents reported receiving Meals on Wheels.
- 21% of survey respondents stated there were other people in their homes or family who need access to food or nutritional support during COVID-19 pandemic.

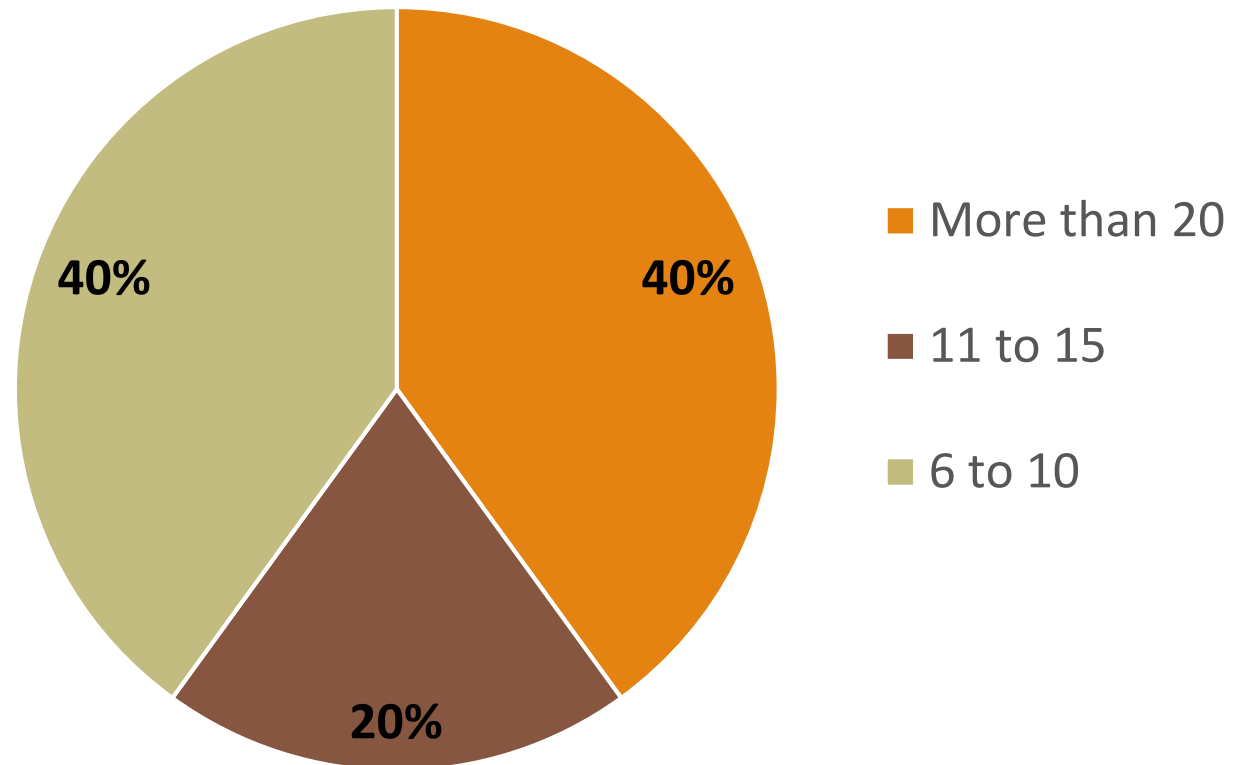
Agency Survey Findings

Have you received calls or requests from individuals due to lack of access to food during the COVID-19 pandemic?



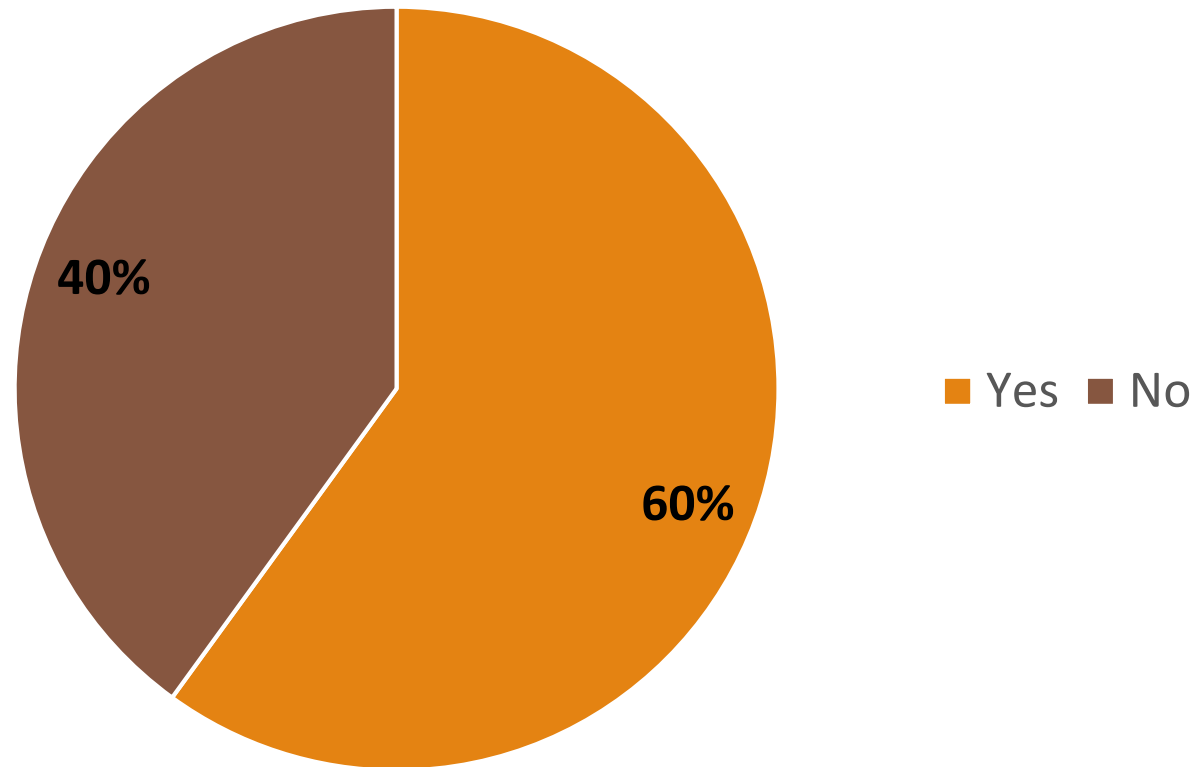
Agency Survey Findings(cont. 2)

How many calls have you received?



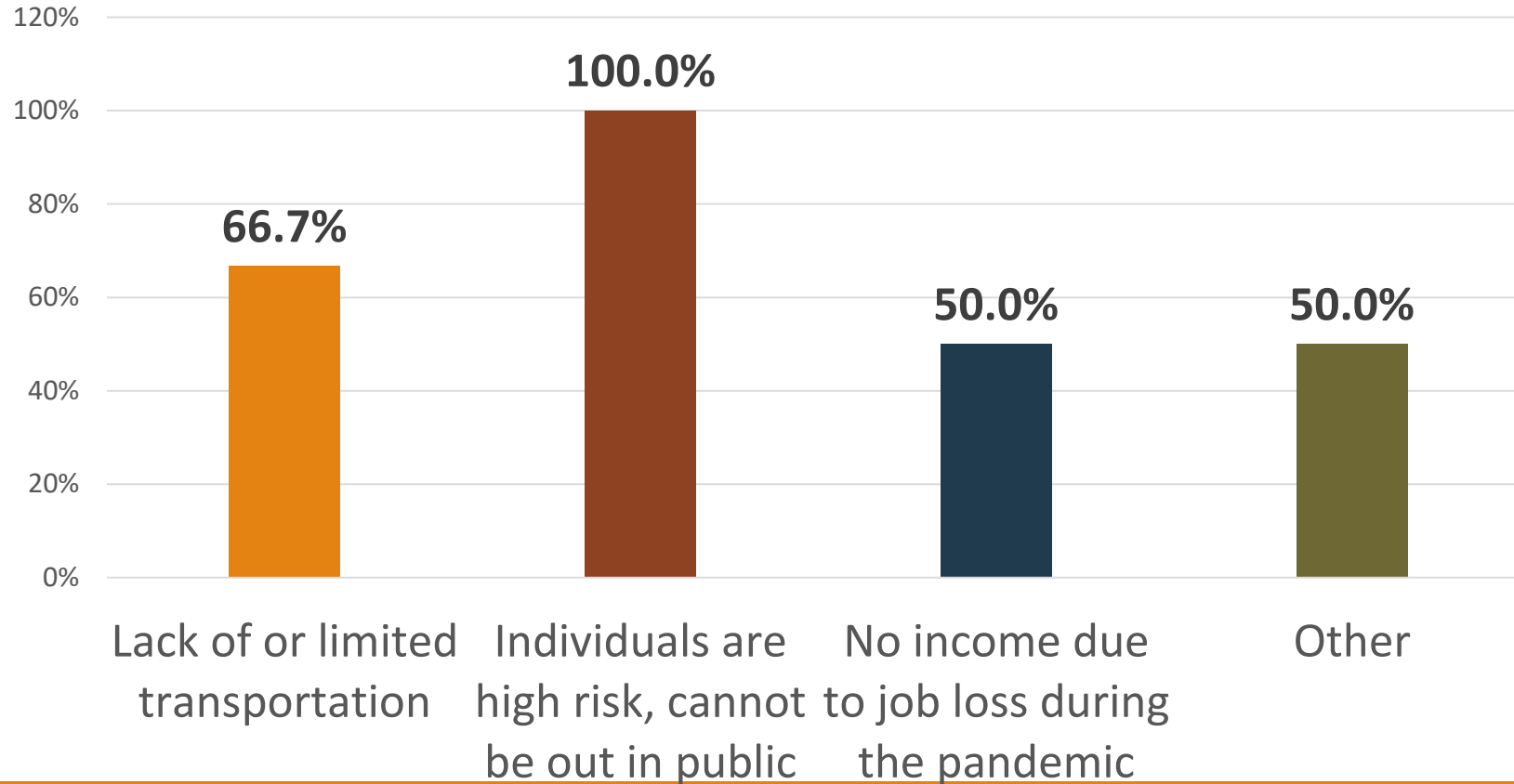
Agency Survey Findings (cont. 3)

Is your agency able to assist individuals directly?



Agency Survey Findings (cont. 4)

What are some of the challenges or barriers consumers in your region or county are experiencing related to either food access or nutritional supports during COVID-19 pandemic? (check all that apply)



Agency Survey Findings (cont. 5)

How are you reaching out to consumers to inform them of resources related to food access and nutritional supports within the community?

- Facebook posts, phone calls, emails
- Staff have been in contact with consumers on a weekly basis since late March to gauge need. We have sent out flyers to consumers letting them know that they can contact our agency for assistance. We have a new collaboration with Hunger Task force for monthly food pick-up and we have begun work on a plan to reach out to individuals with disabilities through our social media outlets. Information is available for callers as well.
- They call us/general phone calls to consumers to inquire how there are/referrals from area agencies and organizations.
- Via phone calls and emails.

Thank you

Feedback or Questions?

[Lisa Sobczyk](#)

(Lisa.Sobczyk@dhs.wisconsin.gov)

[Ashley Walker](#)

(Ashley.Walker@dhs.wisconsin.gov)

[Maia Stitt](#)

(Maia.Stitt@dhs.wisconsin.gov)



Attachment 6

State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

1 WEST WILSON STREET,
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POST OFFICE BOX 2659
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Tuesday, June 23, 2020

The Honorable T.R. Williams
Deputy Outreach Director
Office of Governor Tony Evers
115 E Capitol Dr. # 1
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Ms. Williams,

Thank you once again for the invitation extended to the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) to participate in the June 3, 2020 Engaging Stakeholders conference call. The time and interest shown by the Governor's office to convene leaders of disability organizations in Wisconsin to develop more effective coordination of effort and communication among these groups is both efficient and necessary.

The GCPD met on June 17, 2020 and discussed how the Committee might be able to be of service to both the Governor and Lieutenant Governor's offices. As a cross-disability committee with six of its members representing specific disability constituencies, the GCPD is already uniquely positioned to serve in a number of specific ways. The GCPD is available and able to serve in the following capacity:

- **Being a sounding board which can draft or evaluate recommendations, policies, executive orders, state legislation, and programs impacting people with disabilities.** With GCPD's diverse membership it can provide expertise and through examination on issues impacting people with disabilities and the Committee has had the pleasure of serving in this role and capacity for over seventy years. Most recently it



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Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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served as the oversight Committee to the Promise Program for the Department of Workforce Development.

- **Ability to gather information and data on emerging issues. The GCPD accepts public comment at all of its meetings and on an ongoing basis.** As a result, the Committee receives information directly from people with disabilities on programs, policies, and other issues that may be directly impacting them. Based on this type of correspondence, the Committee is currently conducting a survey to gather data on the number of people with disabilities who do not have access to food due to the current pandemic. Based on this information, the GCPD will publish the data and make recommendations to the Department of Health Services on how this issue may be addressed throughout the state both during the current pandemic and how this can be addressed in the future.
- **Convener of stakeholders to work toward shared goals and outcomes to improve the lives of people with disabilities.** The GCPD advocated for over 15 years to expand the Medicaid Assistance Purchase Plan (MAPP) which allows people with disabilities to work while receiving needed supports. It led a workgroup on this topic which led to these changes being included in the 2017-2019 state budget and the Department of Health Services creating a stakeholder group to advise on MAPP expansion. This required the Committee to engage many stakeholders beyond the Committee's membership.
- **Lines of communication are established and efficient with Governor and Secretary appointed disability councils and state agencies.** This allows GCPD to identify problem issues. The Committee has a history of proposing specific action steps, as evidenced by the recent recommendations the Committee made earlier this year regarding the State Use Board.



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I am pleased to report that the opportunity to elevate the role of the GCPD was met with enthusiastic and unanimous support of Committee members. Please know that, in order to meet the responsibilities of a broader and more active role, the GCPD has already taken important initial steps. We have increased the frequency of our meetings to a bi-monthly schedule and, within the existing authority of our by-laws, the Committee has agreed to a more active role for the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will now be meeting on a weekly basis for the foreseeable future in order to be more responsive and efficient.

In summary, the GCPD invites a charge from the Governor's office to act in this more elevated role and believes the Committee is equipped to respond effectively. In this, the 30th anniversary year of the Americans with Disabilities Act, it seems more appropriate than ever that we all commit ourselves to this essential and inclusive work.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss how the GCPD can be of service to this administration. Please feel free to call or email me with any questions or requests you may have of the Committee. I can be reached at (920)248-9210 or David.Morstad@gmail.com.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Morstad".

David Morstad
Chair
Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities



State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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CC: Governor Tony Evers

Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes

Wenona Wolf

Noah Roberts

Carrie Molke

Amber Mullett

GCPD Executive Committee



Attachment 7

State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act

WHEREAS, on July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure the civil rights of people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the people of Wisconsin recognize that all its citizens, regardless of ability, are entitled to full participation in community life and the pursuit of happiness, health and independence; and

WHEREAS, people with disabilities represent the largest minority group in the nation, and the ADA established a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination while upholding principles of equality and inclusion; and

WHEREAS, the ADA has expanded opportunities for Americans with disabilities by reducing barriers, changing perceptions, and increasing full participation in the workplace, the community, and the legislative process; and

WHEREAS, the full promise of the ADA will only be reached if we remain committed to continue our efforts to fully implement the ADA; and

WHEREAS, recognizing there is still work to be done to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities;

NOW THEREFORE, I Governor Tony Evers do hereby proclaim the 30th anniversary of the ADA as a time to celebrate and recognize the progress that has been made, and to reaffirm our strong commitment to disability rights as civil rights in Wisconsin.



Attachment 8

State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

Wednesday, July 23, 2020

CONTACT: David Morstad, Chair, (920) 248-9210, david.morstad@gmail.com



CELEBRATING THE 30th ANNIVERSARY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

***Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities acknowledges there is
still work to be done***

MADISON, WI - The Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) is recognizing the 30th anniversary of the signing of the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA). Since people with disabilities represent the largest minority group in the nation, the signing of the ADA was a landmark moment that established a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination while upholding principles of equality and inclusion for people with disabilities.

The ADA prevents discrimination in the workplace and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified applicants or employees and public places to be accessible, in order to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. In the years since its passing, the ADA has been expanded to include telephone and Internet accessibility.

"At the core, ADA means that just because you are born with a disability, you shouldn't be unable to do basic things like get into a building, or use a bathroom in a restaurant. Without ADA, I wouldn't be living my best life or independently," said Pearl Fessenden, GCPD member-at-large.

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Ben Barrett, Co-Chair of the Wisconsin Council on Physical Disabilities shared, "The ADA has allowed a small group of committed individuals to create heroic change. Always behind the scenes are invisible people doing the pushing. I would not have done what I did had I not met Shel Trap and Justin Dart Jr. They woke me up the need for individual advocacy and the fact that that was the only way my situation would change. It's about others not me."

Although the ADA has expanded opportunities for Americans with disabilities by reducing barriers, changing perceptions, and increasing full participation in the workplace, the community, and the legislative process there is still much work to be done.

People with disabilities are still often not able to work, as earning income, may cause them to lose vital medical or daily living supports, which are unaffordable without benefits assistance. Additionally, many people with disabilities are not able to get married as asset limits in benefit programs are counted and requires them to impoverish their spouse to continue to receive needed supports. Nationally and in Wisconsin there also still remains a lack of accessible housing and transportation for people with disabilities. In addition, the recent pandemic has highlighted that people with disabilities are still denied accommodations and are treated as second rate citizens in the health care system.

"Like all anniversaries related to civil rights, the 30th year of the ADA forces us to reflect on the past and what the future can be," said David Morstad, chair of the GCPD. "We celebrate the opportunities realized because of this legislation, while committing ourselves to the unfinished work of ensuring equality for people with disabilities."

In recognition of the 30th Anniversary of the signing of the ADA, GCPD is collecting written and video stories from people with disabilities in Wisconsin on the impact the ADA has had on their lives. In addition, GCPD is requesting people with disabilities identify issues or civil rights that still need to be addressed, which may be incorporated into the GCPD's work plan for policy and legislative advocacy. To submit your story and help to identify barriers which still exist, please visit GCPD's website at: <https://gcpd.wisconsin.gov>.

##



State of Wisconsin

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About the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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Unlike other disability councils in state government, the focus of the Governor's Committee includes all disabilities and six of its members represent specific disability constituencies:

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- Mental health, and
- Physical disabilities.

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- Promote public awareness of the needs and abilities of people with disabilities.
- Encourage the effective involvement of people with disabilities in government.

To learn more about GCPD, visit GCPD's website: gcpd.wisconsin.gov.



Attachment 9

State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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Summary of GCPD Public Comment Survey Responses Relative to Policies Identified by the Governor's Taskforce on Caregiving

Following are the comments entered on the Public Comment Survey relative to policies identified by the Governor's Task Force on Caregiving. The GCPD supported each of the policies, albeit some with reservations. In all, there were seven specific policies on which GCPD offered input. Due to the word limit of the online form, comments from specific constituent GCPD member councils were edited - in some cases, heavily.

Medical Leave Act Amendments

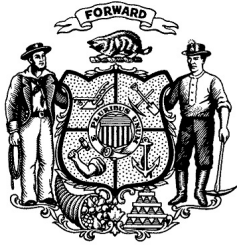
Support without comment.

Credit for Caring

The GCPD supports this, however many of the qualified expenses that are identified are likely covered by Home and Community Based Waiver services (IRIS/Family Care/Partnership/PACE) and would not be eligible for the tax credit. Also recommend a review the actual bill language, e.g., "must be the claimant's spouse or related to the claimant." What does "related to the claimant" mean? Would this include domestic partnerships? Please further define "claimant" - who is the claimant?

Legislative change: The Care Act

It seems unclear whether this is focused on family caregivers or caregivers more broadly. Both "family caregivers" and "caregivers" are referenced and that distinction would make a big difference. Issues may arise since there are confidentiality rules under HIPAA that would prohibit Hospitals/ Clinics from giving out confidential information to anyone without permission of the patient or guardian. We feel that 1. Patient privacy must be respected and 2. The patient should be allowed to "opt out" if they do not wish to have their caregiver recorded in their file, receive notifications, or receive explanations. We would expect that families would receive caregiver training on needed care to be given a patient at discharge.



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Benefits: Medicaid Expansion

We would recommend that acronyms (e.g., ASA) need to be removed, spelled out, or explained. "Caregiver workforce" vs "Direct Support Professionals" seem basically the same. Could we use one or the other to provide consistency? Regarding potential funding options, please consider "physically or otherwise demanding" over "this is a hazardous job" It is not a funding option and suggests that the "costs" will be high.

Benefits: Earnings Disregard

Please provide clarity that the proposal here is not for people with disabilities, but for their caregivers and that the recruitment challenges faced by provider agencies could lead to fewer community-based options for people with disabilities.

The Amount of earnings to be deferred is "to be determined". By whom and how?

Caregivers clearly do not earn an acceptable wage for home care. While there may be many skilled caregivers available, they cannot afford to work in that capacity. Further Recruitment and Retention ideas might include school credit incentives for students in nursing and related fields, a means for caregivers to obtain CNA certification at low or no cost if they agree to stay in the homecare field for a certain amount of time, or online educational opportunities for caregivers.

Home Care Provider Registry

While we generally support the principle, there are concerns. If there is no vetting of who can or cannot be included in the registry, it is unclear how helpful this would really be. Additionally, it is not clear who would create and maintain this registry. Resources will need to be identified and funded to support this. It's just a clearing house for names of persons who need care providers. Important issues such as screening, references and background checks are left to the person looking for services. How much of a service does this actually provide? Would this site at the very least allow reviews of service from customers?



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Regarding Regulatory Proposal for Pre- and Post-COVID-19

There are several components of this document. The GCPD certainly favors making administrative rules easier for people to understand and we support administrative simplification and streamlining to make it easier for providers and for citizens to access services. Whether the committee would support other elements needs our further study and discussion.

Submitted by:

David Morstad, Chair

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities



Attachment 10

State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday, August 18, 2020

CONTACT: David Morstad, Chair, (920) 248-9210, david.morstad@gmail.com

Unequal Effect of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities

MADISON, WI – Data from the Centers for Disease Control and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) highlight the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on people with disabilities. Recent studies in the U.S. have found that people with pre-existing medical conditions were more likely to acquire the virus and, in those same studies, 90% of those who died from the virus had underlying health concerns. This is significant since it has been reported by DHS that 40% of people with a disability in the state have fair or poor health compared to 6% without a disability.

Wisconsin citizens with disabilities are more likely to be overweight, have diabetes, high cholesterol, and/or high blood pressure. In addition, one in four people with a disability is unable to obtain medical care due to cost, compared to one in ten people without a disability. These physical conditions are complicated by the fact that people with disabilities are far less likely to visit a doctor, and far more likely to experience frequent mental distress than the typical population.

In addition to the complications people with disabilities face, the pandemic and stay at home orders have highlighted gaps in our current service delivery system, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. In partnership with the Office for Physical Disabilities and Independent Living, the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities recently conducted a survey on food access and security issues being experienced by people with disabilities. Survey data was received from citizens in 44 counties and 81% of the respondents reported having a disability. Regular and dependable access to food was shown to be a significant concern with 39% of survey respondents stating that food access has been an issue due to the pandemic.

Among the most commonly identified barriers to food access were lack of transportation, and simply being in a high-risk health group and staying home to avoid the hazard of exposure in stores. When faced with food access concerns, most



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respondents did not turn to existing state or county resources as a solution. In fact, the vast majority (72%) turned to family members for the support they needed.

“Wisconsin’s most vulnerable citizens face a different set of challenges in this time,” said David Morstad, chair of the GCPD, “Based on this information, the GCPD is looking toward recommendations that would strengthen the network of communication and food security.”

##

About the Governor’s Committee for People with Disabilities

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- Promote effective operation of publicly-administered or supported programs serving people with disabilities.
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- Encourage the effective involvement of people with disabilities in government.

To learn more about GCPD, visit GCPD's website: gcpd.wisconsin.gov.



Attachment 11

State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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October 9, 2020

The Honorable Tony Evers
115 E. Capitol Dr. # 1
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers,

Thank you for your ongoing advocacy for safe practices relative to the current pandemic and your particular concern for Wisconsin citizens with disabilities.

The Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) and its constituent councils across the disability spectrum have been closely monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on people with disabilities. National data is clear that people with disabilities are at greater risk than the general population to contract the virus, to be hospitalized for it and, tragically, more likely to die from it. In the midst of this extreme level of concern, it is more important than ever that people with disabilities be afforded equal access to healthcare services.

In general, people with disabilities often are more susceptible to preventable health problems that decrease their overall health and quality of life.

Health disparities and secondary conditions can be the result of inaccessible health care facilities and equipment, lack of knowledge among health professionals about specific differences among people with disabilities, transportation difficulties, and higher poverty rates among people with disabilities.

Accessibility applies to both communication and physical access. For instance, health professionals need to be aware of how to effectively communicate with patients who have a range of disabilities, including people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a speech, vision, or intellectual disability. Providers should ensure that accessible medical equipment is available for people with disabilities (such as scales, examination tables, or chairs). In addition, providers should plan for additional time during examinations, if needed.



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Unfair practices

In many healthcare settings, a common policy designed to control the spread of COVID-19 has unfairly infringed upon the rights of people with disabilities; specifically, by not allowing a disability support person (paid or unpaid) to accompany a person with a disability during medical consultation and treatments. The accompanying person would be in a position to provide personal care and positioning, clear communication, and explanation of medical options. Perhaps most important, the accompanying person would be in a position to provide personal advocacy. Regrettably, the "No Visitors" policies may result in deleterious and sub-optimal clinical outcomes. Such designated support personnel are not passive "visitors," they can provide vital information that can impact clinical decisions and outcomes. They may also provide communication support between the patient and hospital staff or implement specialized support strategies to aid the patient to comply with clinical treatments. Accommodations in the policies are needed to ensure that a caregiver is permitted to be with the patient starting with admission and through to the care/treatment process. Such policies should permit a caregiver to be present to the greatest extent possible. It is further recommended that hospitals have a protocol in place for providing infection control briefings and providing appropriate PPEs to disability support persons.

As a result many states have issued state policies and guidance that includes exemptions for no-visitor policies for disability support persons including California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island (More information on state guidance issued is available at: <https://communicationfirst.org/covid-19/covid-19-guidance>).

In addition, it has been widely reported that, in some states (e.g., Alabama, Florida, Utah) people with disabilities have been denied hospital admission or judged to be unlikely for ventilator support solely based upon a medical presumption of their quality of life. Such practices have no place in Wisconsin and the presence of a supportive advocate is an important measure of prevention against such practices.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), covering all health care and social services programs and activities of public entities and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is clear that people with disabilities must not "by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination"



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in a provider's healthcare services. In addition, both the Office of Civil Rights and FEMA have been clear that "allocation and/or denial of care under Crisis Standards of Care must be "free from stereotypes and biases, including generalizations and judgments about the individual's quality of life or relative value to society, based on the individual's disability, age, race, income level, or any protected basis."

Recommendation

In order to help ensure the equal access to healthcare, we recommend that Wisconsin issues state policies or guidance that includes exemptions for no-visitor policies for disability support persons. This will ensure disability support persons will be allowed to accompany a person with a disability during medical evaluation and treatment and ensure healthcare providers recognize this a reasonable accommodation.

If you have any questions regarding the issues raised in this letter or GCPD's recommendation, please contact me at david.morstad@gmail.com or (920) 248-9210.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Morstad".

David Morstad, Chair
Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

CC: GCPD Executive Committee Members, Noah Roberts, Fred Ludwig



Attachment 12

State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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Monday, November 23, 2020

The Honorable Tony Evers
115 E. Capitol Dr. # 1
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers,

This letter serves to provide insight into the issues facing individuals with disabilities throughout Wisconsin, which have emerged or become more poignant during this pandemic including:

- Disability Support Persons Not Allowed to Accompany Individuals with Disabilities to Medical Treatments.
- Access to COVID Testing.
- Testing and Vaccinations for Individuals who are Homebound.
- Public Health Orders and Information in Accessible Formats.
- Health and Safety of Individuals with Dementia.
- Caregiver Shortages.
- Telehealth and Broadband Access.
- Representation of Individuals with Disabilities on State Medical Advisory Committee.

In the attachments to this letter, GCPD identifies these issues and lists recommendations to address these issues being faced by people with disabilities. GCPD is dedicated to enhancing the health and well-being of Wisconsin citizens who have disabilities. As a committee of Governor-appointed volunteers with cross-disability council representation (Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Council on Physical Disabilities, Statutory Council on Blindness), GCPD serves to advise the Governor, state agencies, and the state legislature on issues of concern for people who have disabilities.

Wisconsin is in a state of emergency which is the exact time when vulnerable adults need additional support. This document is focused on areas of concern which have emerged due to COVID-19 pandemic, however, for the most part they are issues of ongoing concern. National data is clear that people with disabilities are at greater risk than the general population to contract the virus, to be hospitalized for it and, tragically, more likely to die from it.



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As with many COVID-19 related problems, solutions which have been implemented will serve to improve life for citizens in general beyond this pandemic. GCPD believes this will be the case for individuals with disabilities if these solutions and policies are implemented.

GCPD looks forward to discussing these issues and potential policy recommendations further. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at david.morstad@gmail.com or (920) 248-9210.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Morstad".

David Morstad, Chair
Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

CC: GCPD Members, Noah Roberts, and Fred Ludwig



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Issue: Disability Support Persons Not Allowed to Accompany Individuals with Disabilities to Medical Treatments

In many healthcare settings, a common policy designed to control the spread of COVID-19 has unfairly infringed upon the rights of people with disabilities; specifically, not allowing a disability support person (paid or unpaid) to accompany a person with a disability during medical consultation and treatments. This is much more poignant during a health emergency as the need to understand diagnoses, treatments, and ways to stay safe are critical. Individuals who are on Medicaid are much more likely to have lower health literacy than the general population and are at higher risk of hospitalization.

Recommendation:

- In order to help ensure the equal access to healthcare, we recommend that Wisconsin issues state policies or guidance that includes exemptions for no-visitor policies for disability support persons. This will ensure disability support persons will be allowed to accompany a person with a disability during medical evaluation and treatment and ensure healthcare providers recognize this a reasonable accommodation.

Many states have issued state policies and guidance that includes exemptions for no visitor policies for disability support persons including California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island (More information on state guidance issued is available at: <https://communicationfirst.org/covid-19/covid-19-guidance>).



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Issue: Access to COVID Testing

COVID-19 testing is widely recognized as one important measure to ensure public health and safety. Individuals with disabilities in Wisconsin have experienced difficulties in obtaining COVID-19 tests due to some sites not being fully physically accessible or communication not being accessible.

Drive-Thru testing sites have increased accessibility to the general public and some people with disabilities, however, they are additional measures these test sites can take to make them more accessible to people with disabilities including training staff on disability etiquette, having mechanisms in place for people to request needed accommodations, ensuring drive-thru can accommodate wheelchair accessible vehicles, and providing accessible communication.

Recommendations:

- GCPD recommends that the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) issue guidance to both in-person and drive-thru testing sites/providers on how to make they are accessible to all people.
 - [Guidance on how to make drive-thru sites accessible](https://adata.org/factsheet/accessibility-drive-thru-medical-sites) can be found at: <https://adata.org/factsheet/accessibility-drive-thru-medical-sites>.
 - Michigan is one state that has issued this [guidance for COVID-19 test sites](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/Best_Practices_for_Accessibility_at_Michigan_Testing_Sites_final_v9_698962_7.pdf) to address accessibility for both people of color and people of disabilities. This document is available at: [www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/Best Practices for Accessibility at Michigan Testing Sites final v9 698962 7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/Best_Practices_for_Accessibility_at_Michigan_Testing_Sites_final_v9_698962_7.pdf).
- DHS should also have COVID testing sites, by County, in an accessible PDF or other format on its website, as this information is not fully accessible for people with disabilities in its current format on the DHS website.



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Issue: Testing and Vaccinations for Individuals who are Homebound

Individuals who are homebound due to disability, mobility issues, age, or receiving Hospice care are able to receive flu shots from their local health departments. However, due to the pandemic, health departments are not offering this service. While they aren't subject to community spread, they do have caregivers (both paid and unpaid) entering their homes on a daily basis and are at risk for exposure to the flu and COVID-19. In addition, although some of these individuals may receive home healthcare through a visiting nurse or doctor, but these medical professionals do not have a mechanism to access the flu vaccine in order to provide it in home. This will also be a challenge with the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccine to be delivered to homebound individuals.

In addition, if an older adult or person with a disability learns they have been exposed to COVID-19 by a caregiver or family member and needs a COVID-19 test, there is currently no way for these individuals to be tested in the safety of their homes.

Recommendations:

- GCPD recommends that DHS contract with home health agencies or other providers who are able to provide flu shots, COVID vaccines, and/or COVID-19 tests to individuals who are homebound and cannot get to a medical facility for vaccines and testing.
- GCPD recommends creating a waiver or way for visiting nurses and physicians to obtain the flu and COVID-19 vaccine so they are able to administer them to homebound individuals.



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Issue: Public Health Orders and Information in Accessible Formats

During this pandemic, individuals with disabilities have been subject to misinformation about preventative measures to take, the spread of the disease, and public health orders as this information has not been in accessible formats. This has been especially true for Deaf individuals who use American Sign Language (ASL). Many of the verbs and nouns used in English don't translate to ASL. In addition, public health information that has been shared via social media or on state websites has not been fully accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired who use screen readers or other assistive technology to navigate websites or read documents.

Furthermore, much of the public health information that has been disseminated has included high-level medical terminology which is not understandable for individuals for which English is a second language, people who have cognitive disabilities, or who have little or no health literacy.

Some general recommendations to ensure public health information is accessible include:

- Captioning and sign language for all live and recorded events and communications including state addresses, press briefings, and live social media.
- Converting materials into "Easy Read" or plain language formats so that they are accessible for people with intellectual disability or cognitive impairment.
- Developing accessible written information products by using appropriate document formats, (such as "Word"), with structured headings, large print, braille versions, and formats for people who are deafblind.
- Working with disability organizations, including advocacy bodies and disability service providers to disseminate public health information.

There are some great resources on making public health information accessible including:

- World Health Organization, "[Disability Considerations during the COVID-19 Outbreak](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/disability/eng-covid-19-disability-briefing-who.pdf?sfvrsn=963e22fe_1)." Available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/disability/eng-covid-19-disability-briefing-who.pdf?sfvrsn=963e22fe_1.
- FEMA, "[COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Considerations for People with Disabilities](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_covid_bp_disability_considerations.pdf)." Available at: https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/fema_covid_bp_disability_considerations.pdf.
- ITU, "[Guidelines On how to ensure that digital information, services and products are accessible by all people, including Persons with Disabilities during COVID-19](https://www.itu.int/en/SiteAssets/COVID-19/ITU-Guidelines-on-digital-accessibility.pdf)." Available at: <https://www.itu.int/en/SiteAssets/COVID-19/ITU-Guidelines-on-digital-accessibility.pdf>.



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Issue: Public Health Orders and Information in Accessible Formats (continued)

- AT3, "[Information and Communication Technology Accessibility Resources for Documents, Social Media, Computer, and Mobile Device Access](https://www.at3center.net/repository/ICTCoPResources)." Available at: <https://www.at3center.net/repository/ICTCoPResources>.

Recommendations:

- GCPD recommends that the DHS adopt "plain language" protocol for all public health information and the Governor's office adopt this protocol for all public health related executive orders.
- In addition, GCPD recommends all documents be made accessible for deafblind, blind, and visually impaired individuals.
- State agency websites where information is posted should be fully accessible to people with disabilities who utilize assistive technology and screen readers to navigate websites. There should also be a way for people with disabilities to request documents in an accessible format, if the materials on the website are not accessible.
- Public health information and executive orders should be readily available in Spanish and other languages so people can understand the preventive measures they should be taking to protecting themselves and reduce the spread of COVID-19.



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Issue: Health and Safety of Individuals with Dementia

This pandemic and related prevention and safety measures has been especially difficult for individuals with dementia and their families to understand. Given the risks that older adults face from both COVID-19 and dementia, The [Centers for Disease Control has provided additional guidance to caregivers of adults with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia](#) to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to help them manage their patients' physical and mental wellbeing as well as their own wellbeing. However, not all people living with dementia require caregivers. Therefore, the degree of assistance a person needs will depend on the extent that their dementia has progressed. For people living with dementia, changes in behavior or worsening symptoms of dementia should be evaluated because they can be an indication of worsening stress and anxiety as well as COVID-19 or other infections.

Recommendation:

- GCPD recommends that a Living Well Toolkit be developed for individuals with dementia and their families, modeled after the [Board for People with Development Disabilities COVID-19 Resource Toolkit](https://wi-bpdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/LW-Covid-Toolkit-Final-Full.pdf) (<https://wi-bpdd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/LW-Covid-Toolkit-Final-Full.pdf>), which has recently been published. The toolkit focuses on how individuals can stay healthy, stay safe, and stay connected during this pandemic.



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Issue: Mask Mandate and Communication

GCPD recognizes the importance of masks in reducing the spread of COVID-19. However, Deaf people and individuals who are hard of hearing are struggling to communicate in certain situations due to the mask mandate. Many individuals with hearing impairments rely heavily on lip reading or facial expressions to understand what is being communicated, and it's important to be able to see the person to communicate effectively.

Recommendations:

- GCPD recommends the publication and distribution of communication cards for use at clinics and hospitals and other facilities where urgent communication about health care takes place with Deaf people or people with hearing impairments, recognizing it may take time to get an accommodation in place to effectively communicate.
- In addition, GCPD recommends the guidance be sent to medical providers stating that if an individual needs to remove a mask to communicate effectively or if an individual needs a medical provider to wear a face shield to communicate effectively that there is a process in place for requesting these accommodations.



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Issue: Caregiver Shortages

Wisconsin is experiencing a statewide caregiver shortage, which was an ongoing issue prior to COVID-19, and now is at a critical point. The pandemic has caused instability in the caregiver workforce as workers are unable to provide care if their children's school or daycare has closed, if they are sick, or have been exposed to COVID-19. With lack of backup caregivers available this has caused some individuals with disabilities to move from their homes or apartments to live with parents or relatives or to move into rehabilitation facilities.

Recommendations:

- GCPD recommends DHS creating caregiver education materials on their personal responsibility to behave safely and the risk they pose to the people they care for when they disregard safeguards to prevent COVID-19 spread. This includes personal behavior, not coming to work sick or if they have been exposed to COVID-19, getting their flu shot, and the COVID-19 vaccine when available.
- GCPD also recommends the state providing temporary hazard pay for caregivers providing Medicaid-funded services during the pandemic to compensate workers for the risk they are enduring while caring for people with disabilities.
- In addition, GCPD recommends DHS requesting MCOs, ICAs, and other personal care providers to provide caregivers paid sick time to discourage caregivers coming to work when they are ill.



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Issue: Telehealth and Broadband Access

Broadband connectivity is quickly becoming one of the most basic of human needs. Broadband connectivity provides: communication with others; opportunity to grow through education and employment; and connection to essential information and services. Broadband is widely available across the United States. However, there continues to be pockets of unserved areas and this is especially true in rural areas of Wisconsin. Although programs exist to assist with the cost of internet service and technology devices these programs are not beneficial if broadband access is not available.

The need for broadband access has become even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Broadband access is needed for remote work, school work, to access unemployment benefits, to enter bank information for stimulus checks, for telehealth visits, and to connect with others during times of social isolation. Also the internet has been a vital resource in providing information about COVID-19 as well as information on safety precautions to prevent community spread of the virus. Without connectivity there are pockets of people with disabilities who may not have access to this information through other means. In addition, this means there are people with disabilities who do not have access to vital telehealth services.

Recommendations:

- GCPD recommends the state invest in broadband infrastructure and cell phone towers in Wisconsin needs to occur to enable people with disabilities to live independently.
- GCPD also recommends the state provides funding for devices and hotspots to people with disabilities. GCPD recommends using Illinois as a project model where their ATP received \$1.7 million CARES Act funding and leveraged an additional \$250,000 because the response rate had exceeded the funding available. They created the Illinois Cares Connection Project offering two bundles (iPad and Android). Participants who do not have internet are offered a year of service. They also have a data system to track activity from referral to fulfillment, tutorial for both bundles, provide telephone technical assistance, and more.



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Issue: Representation of Individuals with Disabilities on State Medical Advisory Committee

One concern that emerged early in the pandemic was the formation of a State Medical Advisory Committee which is making recommendations related to COVID treatments which did not include first-person representation of an individual with a disability. Often, disability representation is an after-thought when groups are making recommendations and/or decisions that affect citizens of Wisconsin. GCPD thinks it is important to have representation as many people are unfamiliar with the complex social, economic, political, and cultural ramifications of disability in our society.

Recommendation:

- GCPD recommends that it be standard protocol to have first-person representation (a person with a disability) on the State Medical Advisory Committee as it is important that people with disabilities be represented in community and government decision-making which directly impacts them.