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Website: dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd

December 31, 2023

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

Dear Governor Evers,

Attached please find the 2023 Annual Report of the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD). The report is divided into two sections: Structure and Function, Activities, and Membership.

The work and accomplishments of the GCPD was made possible by the efforts of Committee members together with the significant engagement of the staff from the Department of Health Services and involvement of the Governor's and Lieutenant Governor's offices.

Respectfully,

Margaret Kristan, 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 2023

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 2023 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

- In 2023, the full Committee transitioned back to meeting on a quarterly meeting basis. The Executive Committee continues to meet monthly. The work GCPD is doing continues to require research and collaboration, as outlined in GCPD's plan 3-year Work Plan and related to policy initiatives and issues.
- The Governor's Committee continues to be 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.



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- [GCPD's 2022-2024 Work Plan](#) continues to focus on Transportation, Employment, and Opportunities and Access.

Activities

- GCPD Unveils New Look
 - The GCPD of Wisconsin unveiled a new logo on May 17, 2023, to identify its diverse services and advocacy in Wisconsin. The GCPD worked with Impact Design, LLC of Muskego to provide the new identifying graphic. The process involved the review of multiple ideas and designs based on accessibility standards, representation of all disabilities, and recommendations from full GCPD membership (Attachment 1).
- GCPD and Concordia University/Wisconsin School of Allied Health Professions Project
 - Throughout 2023, GCPD partnered with Concordia University of Wisconsin to provide presentations to students in several healthcare and allied health programs including nursing, physicians' assistant, and physical, occupational, and speech therapy programs. The presentations focus on healthcare access and supportive communication practices for patients with disabilities (Attachment 2).
- United Voices Engage for Change Event
 - On October 3-5, 2023, GCPD members attended the DHS United Voices Engage for Change Event in Madison, WI. The event hosted all six Office for Promotion of Independent Living (OPIL) Councils and Committees.
- Certificate of Commendation Honoring GCPD 75th Anniversary
 - On October 4, 2023, the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities received a Certificate of Commendation Award from Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers honoring and celebrating 75 years of existence and continued tireless advocacy for programs, policies, services, and legislation to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Wisconsin (Attachment 3).
- Change of Leadership
 - In December 2023, GCPD held officer elections and elected Dan Laatsch as GCPD Chair. Rhonda Staats was re-elected to the Vice Chair position.



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Membership

The members listed below served on GCPD during calendar year 2023.

Member's Name	Member's Role
Margaret Kristan	Chair, Member-at-Large, Executive Committee
Rhonda Staats	Vice-Chair, Representative Statutory Council on Blindness, Executive Committee
Justin Koestler	Governor's Office Ex-Officio Member
Ben Barrett	Representative Wisconsin Council on Physical Disabilities, Executive Committee Member
Ashley Mathy	Representative Board for People with Developmental Disabilities
VACANT	Representative Wisconsin Council on Mental Health
BJ (Elizabeth) Ermenc	Representative Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Stacy Stone	Representative State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse
Dan Idzikowski	Member-at-large
Dan Witt	Member-at-large
Daniel Laatsch	Member-at-large, Person with a Disability
David Morstad	Member-at-large, Opportunities and Access Sub-Committee
Dr. Katherine Schneider	Member-at-large, Opportunities and Access Sub-Committee
Nancy Leipzig	Member-at-large
Pearl Fessenden	Member-at-large
Ramsey Lee	Member-at-large, Executive Committee, Opportunities and Access Sub-Committee, Person with a Disability
Tiffany Payne	Member-at-large, Executive Committee, Person with a Disability
John Hartman	Member-at-large, Executive Committee, Person with a Disability
Cindy Bentley	Member-at-large, Person with a Disability



Attachment 1

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE
May 17, 2023

CONTACT: Margaret Kristan, Chair, (608) 212-5107, mkristan@icarehealthplan.org

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities Unveils New Look

The Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) of Wisconsin has unveiled a new look to identify its diverse services and advocacy in Wisconsin.

The GCPD is a 17-member committee that consists of representatives from the state's statutory councils on disability and governor-appointed members-at-large. Founded in 1948, the GCPD is charged with advising the Governor and state agencies on problems faced by people with disabilities, raising public awareness, and disseminating information about the needs and abilities of people with disabilities.

A new identifying logo has been developed at the same time as a number of new initiatives have been launched by the committee in recent years. Since early 2020, the GCPD has issued numerous policy papers, conducted a state-wide survey regarding access to healthcare, and created an online media project highlighting the unique challenges faced by people with disabilities during the pandemic and on a day-to-day basis.

Most recently, the committee has partnered with Concordia University of Wisconsin to provide presentations to students in several healthcare and allied health programs including nursing, physicians' assistant, and physical, occupational, and speech therapy programs. The presentations focus on healthcare access and supportive communication practices for patients with disabilities.

"We are so thankful for the collaboration with the GCPD," said Lois Harrison of Concordia's School of Allied Health Professions, "The panel presentations they have done at our university for our future health and social care students will help them to become more effective providers to best meet the individual needs of their future clients."

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The GCPD worked with Impact Design, LLC of Muskego to provide the new identifying graphic. The process involved the review of multiple ideas and designs based on accessibility standards, representation of all disabilities, and recommendations from full GCPD membership.

As a result of its expanded activity, the GCPD felt the need to design a logo to distinguish its identity and work from other state committees and councils. The final GCPD logo design represents a unity of voices and focus on policy and initiatives that enhance the lives of people with disabilities throughout the state of Wisconsin.

In addition to its at-large appointees, the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities includes representatives from the Council on Physical Disabilities, the Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, the Council on Mental Health, and the Council on Alcohol and other Drug Abuse. More information can be found at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd.

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Attachment 2

The Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD)

2023 Report on the Concordia University/Wisconsin

School of Allied Health Professions Project

Following is a report of the ongoing collaboration between the GCPD and the Concordia University/Wisconsin School of Health Professions. The aim of the project is to inform students of the barriers to healthcare access faced by people with disabilities, and some practical accommodations that can be made.

Background

While the pandemic created hardships for every Wisconsin citizen, people with disabilities were disproportionately affected. Throughout the 2020 pandemic year, the GCPD received numerous reports from individuals with disabilities who were facing difficulties accessing healthcare services in various clinic and hospital settings. In the Spring of 2021, the GCPD, with support from its DHS liaison staff, developed and distributed a survey to help determine the scope of the problems being faced. With nearly 500 responses from people with disabilities, family members, and individual support assistants/advocates, the survey highlighted numerous physical and communication barriers in healthcare settings statewide.

To properly disseminate the information, the GCPD undertook the ambitious #Access4All Video Project. The videos featured introductory remarks by the Governor and individual testimonies from people with disabilities and family members. The video segments are maintained on the GCPD website and its YouTube channel.

The videos premiered at a virtual event on May 19, 2022. Following that event, Dr. Lois Harrison, the Inter-professional Clinic Coordinator for Allied Professions at Concordia University/Wisconsin reached out to the GCPD to explore the possibility of a collaborative project to raise disability awareness among the students in Concordia's health profession programs.



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Panel Presentations

A panel presentation featuring representatives from the Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Council on Physical Disabilities, and the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was presented at Concordia on **September 14, 2022**.

There were approximately 115 students and faculty in attendance representing programs in:

- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Speech Therapy
- Nursing
- Medical Sonography

Panel members shared the history of their respective Councils, background on the ADA and, most important, shared personal stories of the barriers to healthcare they have faced as a result of their disability. Practical accommodation practices were shared and there were opportunities for students to interact with panel members.

The presentation was well received, and a follow-up presentation was scheduled for the Spring semester. That follow-up presentation took place on **April 26, 2023**, and again featured representatives from various statutory councils, but the content was focused on an examination of specific barriers to healthcare access from the point of making an appointment through follow-up care. Students were asked to participate in small group problem-solving exercises and report their results, including accommodation recommendations.

The Fall semester of 2023 again featured a panel presentation with new panel members, two of whom participated virtually. The student attendance was similar to previous events but with the addition of students and faculty in the Physician's Assistant program. The presentation was made on **November 1, 2023**, and followed a pattern similar to the previous Fall semester. Again, it was well-received by students and faculty.

Next Steps

Beginning with the Spring semester, student schedules and workloads are being closely monitored and it may be necessary for some programs to make attendance at these panel



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presentations optional for their students. Dr. Harrison anticipates that our presentation, scheduled for **April 26, 2024**, will likely have lower numbers of students in attendance. We will also be experimenting with a completely virtual presentation by the panel.

Through the Opportunities and Access sub-committee of the GCPD, discussion has also begun with the Wisconsin Universities and Technical Colleges to explore similar collaboration training experiences within the state system.

All who have participated in this important project have witnessed its value and are confident in its positive long-term results.

Respectfully submitted,

David Morstad

Member-at-Large

GCPD



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Attachment 3





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Image description: Karen Odegaard with the Secretary's Office of the Department of Health Service presenting Governor's Committee members (Rhonda Staats, Margaret Kristan, Ben Barret, David Morstad, Julie Blasky, Dan Idzikowski, Elizabeth (BJ) Ermenc, and Dan Witt) with a 75th Anniversary Commendation from Governor Tony Evers.



Image description: Karen Odegaard with the Secretary's Office of the Department of Health Service presenting Governor's Committee members who are laughing with a 75th Anniversary Commendation from Governor Tony Evers.



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Image description: Rhonda Staats speaking with GCPD members after receiving the commendation.