



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

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For Immediate Release:

**People with Disabilities Face Healthcare Inequities**

Access to healthcare by people with disabilities has been adversely affected by hospital and clinic policies enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic according to findings by the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD). Throughout the pandemic it became common for healthcare providers to limit access only to individual patients while prohibiting others. Many people with disabilities depend on a supporting individual to provide assistance with mobility, communication and understanding, and assure that there is appropriate follow-up. Being prevented from having a support person present during medical appointments may adversely impact care.

In November of 2020, the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) began receiving reports that some people with disabilities were being told by health care providers that they could not have a disability support person present during medical appointments due to the COVID19 pandemic. In February, the GCPD conducted a survey of people with disabilities, caregivers, and advocate organizations in order to determine the extent of the concern.

"The problem of health inequity did not begin with the pandemic but was certainly made worse and more apparent by it," according to David Morstad, Chair of the GCPD, "Almost half of survey respondents stated that someone from the doctor's office, clinic, or hospital told them that their support person or caregiver could not be with them during their appointment. That's a problem."

The GCPD views requests for the presence of a supporting individual as a reasonable accommodation and a right under the American with Disabilities Act.

"The individual for whom I provide support has Cerebral Palsy, and cognitive impairment," stated Lawrence Brown of Milwaukee, "If I am not allowed to accompany him into appointments, the medical staff won't know about his physical support or his recent seizure activity. And there's no one to take notes or ask about follow-up. It's not effective medical care."



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As a result of the findings, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services has issued a statement to medical providers in the state that reads in part, “The ADA requires health care entities to provide full and equal access for people with disabilities... This includes, if requested, the presence of a support individual to assist with communication, physical assistance, mobility, treatment follow-up, or other individual support needs.”

The Governor’s Committee for People with Disabilities is charged with advising the Governor and state agencies on problems faced by people with disabilities, reviewing legislation affecting people with disabilities, promoting the effective operation of publicly-administered programs serving people with disabilities, and encouraging the effective involvement of people with disabilities in government. Committee members represent specific disability constituencies including blindness and visual impairment, deaf and hard of hearing, developmental disabilities, mental health, physical disabilities, and alcohol and other drug abuse.

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