



State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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PRESS RELEASE

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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.”

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About the Governor’s Committee for People with Disabilities

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:

- Alcohol and other drug abuse,
- Blindness and visual impairment,
- Deaf and hard of hearing,
- Developmental disabilities,
- Mental health, and
- Physical disabilities.

The Governor's Committee 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.



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- 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.

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