

# Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations: Says legislature's COVID-19 response helps, not enough

Posted on Thursday, Apr 16, 2020

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Members of the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations reacted today to the legislature's COVID-19 response bill with both gratitude and concern about the ability to meet future needs. Wisconsin is already far behind the actions of at least 44 other states who have moved critical COVID-19 plans forward for federal approval and several others whose state legislatures committed considerable state funding to address the emergency. Wisconsin did not.

"Passage of this legislation is the first step towards drawing down additional federal Medicaid funding to help address critical needs, however Survival Coalition continues to have great uncertainty about whether the day to day needs of people with disabilities will be met during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond," says Lisa Pugh, Co-Chair of Survival.

Survival Coalition praises the legislature for passing critical provisions that will allow for hardship or supplemental payments to home and community-based services (HCBS) providers, allow services to be provided remotely, and relaxing certain prescription drug refill restrictions. However, the bill passed by both houses of the legislature includes no new state funding or other assurances of targeted support for home and community-based services, like Family Care, IRIS and the Children's Long-Term Support program. The State Department of Health Services (DHS) has indicated that any increased federal Medicaid funding alone will not be enough to address needs in these programs.

While new federal Medicaid funding will likely ensure hospitals and other critical acute care settings can meet the health care needs of people who get ill and get health insurance to the newly unemployed, many people with disabilities across Wisconsin are going without daily supports and are unsure if the small business providers who support them will be able to weather the crisis and remain in business.

“We are glad the legislature approved significant parts of the federal waiver plans requested by the Department of Health Services,” says Beth Swedeen, Co-chair of Survival. “These provisions will ensure essential flexibilities are in place so people can continue to receive at least some of the supports they need. We are very concerned about what will happen to folks the longer this situation persists.”

“DHS needs additional funding to ensure things like hazard pay for direct support professionals and to secure personal protective equipment for the community-based workforce,” says Kit Kerschensteiner, Co-Chair of Survival. “When people are able to stay in their homes, they are healthier. We need this workforce to stay on the job and healthy, too.”

The Survival Coalition this week issued a second statewide COVID-19 survey to assess how people are doing. Early results from the survey indicate people are extremely isolated and, in some cases, their health is being compromised. See survey excerpts below.

“After weeks of social isolation family caregivers are reaching their breaking point and people with disabilities are sharing stories of great anxiety,” says Lisa Pugh, Co-Chair of Survival.

Survival Coalition is disappointed the legislature included unnecessary provisions in the bill that go beyond the timeframe of the public health emergency, including a permanent and significant reduction in Certified Nursing Assistant CNA training hours. A targeted bill to address a public health crisis should not include permanent changes to state policy.