

Wisconsin BPDD: Gov. Evers' budget includes abuse protection for people with disabilities

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(MADISON) — The federally-funded Wisconsin Living Well project at the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) applauds Governor Evers for including multiple provisions in his budget that will increase protections against abuse and neglect for people with disabilities in Wisconsin.

“Nationally, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are 7 times more likely than people without disabilities to be victims of abuse. Incidents of abuse, neglect, and exploitation are often unseen, unreported, and unaddressed,” said Sally Flaschberger, Project Manager for the BPDD-Living Well grant. “The budget proposals take steps to ensure people with disabilities can live healthy, safe lives in their communities.”

Adult protective services funding in Wisconsin has remained stagnant since 2006, while reports of abuse and neglect for people with disabilities and older adults has increased by 60%. The Governor’s proposal includes \$13.6 million in funding for the adult protective service system that includes training, guardianship support and other enhancements. In addition, funding will support a new incident management system to provide more timely tracking and trending to help to reduce incidents of abuse and neglect.

The Governor also proposes \$1.6 million to fund 11 new positions in the Office of Caregiver Quality to respond to over 8,500 calls annually on caregiver misconduct against people with disabilities. Funding would almost double the number of positions and allow the investigation rate to rise significantly above the current rate of 5% or 500 investigations a year. In addition, the Bureau of Assisted Living would

receive \$4.1 million to fund 32 new positions to address the backlog and increasing number of complaints in over 4,000 regulated facilities which serve approximately 64,000 residents with disabilities and older adults.

The Governor also included a proposal to fund the current Department of Justice Elder Abuse Hotline. The hotline has been in operation since 2021 and was previously funded by a time-limited federal grant focusing only on older adults. Nationally, 44 states offer a combined hotline to report abuse and neglect of people with disabilities and older adults. The Living Well grant supports expansion of this hotline to include people with disabilities.

“People with disabilities make up 25% of all reports of abuse and neglect to Adult Protective Services in Wisconsin. Our goal is to make sure people with disabilities and their families have an easier way to report abuse,” said Beth Swedeen, BPDD Executive Director.

The Living Well grant team will continue to advocate for these proposals targeted at reducing abuse and neglect and improving the health and safety of people with disabilities with the Governor’s office and the Legislature throughout the budget process.