



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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Sea of Blue T-Shirts Expected in Madison As 700 Citizens Participate in Annual Disability Advocacy Day

Unknown Future of Wisconsin's Long-term Care System a Top Concern

(MADISON) – Nearly 700 disability advocates from across Wisconsin will gather at the Capitol on March 17 for Disability Advocacy Day. Advocates will meet with nearly every Wisconsin State Legislative office to tell their story and discuss public policy issues that impact people with disabilities in their everyday lives.

This year, significant changes to Wisconsin's home-grown long-term care system – affecting Family Care, IRIS, and county-based Aging and Disability Resource Centers – have generated many questions from the disability community. Turnout at the annual event is expected to be nearly double what it has been in recent years.

"While disability advocates have long asked for Family Care to be available to everyone in the state, the expansion proposal on the table changes the program significantly from how people receive supports today," said Survival Coalition Co-Chair Beth Swedeen. "There is a lot of confusion about the announcement to fold the very successful IRIS self-direction option into Family Care. No one can answer long-term care participant questions about how self-direction can really happen under managed care."

Over 50,000 individuals with disabilities and older adults rely on Family Care and IRIS to live independently and in the settings of their choice. The Governor's proposed state budget completely eliminates IRIS as a separate program, dissolves four Managed Care Organizations, and allows the Department of Health Services to make significant changes to the Family Care benefit package. Grassroots participants and their families

are asking for more information on what these changes will entail and what they mean for the 50,000 people who use these programs.

“Family Care and IRIS not only help people with disabilities live in their own homes but they also enable individuals to work, socialize and be active participants in the community,” said Survival Coalition Co-Chair Maureen Ryan. “These changes were proposed without any input from consumers or stakeholders, and many people statewide are telling us they worry that these so-called reforms will jeopardize their ability to live independent lives.”

“We also are getting lots of questions about the future of Aging and Disability Resource Centers,” said Kristin Kerschensteiner, Survival Coalition Co-Chair. “These county-based, unbiased information and referral centers have been extremely useful in providing important information about local services. The proposed budget makes their future uncertain.”

Disability Advocacy Day will include an overview of disability issues and planning time as legislative teams at Monona Terrace from 10:30 to noon. Participants will gather in the Capitol Rotunda at 12:30 p.m. for a short rally and wearing their blue Survival Coalition t-shirts. Legislative visits are scheduled at 1 p.m. for Senate offices, and 2 p.m. for Assembly offices.

Disability Advocacy Day is organized by the Survival Coalition, comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations that advocate and support policies and practices that lead to the full inclusion, participation, and contribution of people living with disability.

Survival Coalition Issue Teams: education, employment, housing, long term care for adults, long term care for children, mental health, transportation, workforce, voting, Medicaid and health care.

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