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**Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations Releases Stories from Statewide Survey Showing how the Legislature’s COVID-19 Response Helps but is not Nearly Enough**

Members of the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations are reacting to the legislature’s COVID-19 response bill which was signed into law by Governor Evers with both gratitude and concern. Results from a statewide survey released today show the legislature’s actions may not be enough to meet the critical needs of vulnerable people with disabilities, older adults and their caregivers who are struggling. Excerpts from the survey, including local stories, are included with this release [**here.**](http://www.survivalcoalitionwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WI_COVID19_Stories_SurveyResults-first-name.docx)

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.

A statewide Survival Coalition survey of more than 400 people with disabilities and aging adults who use long-term care and their families from 56 of Wisconsin’s 72 counties shows they are experiencing fear and isolation, worry about unemployment and not paying bills, and are struggling to care for loved ones, teach children, often while working from home. No additional state money is included in the bill to address these heightened needs, including PPE and hazard pay for direct care workers and pay for families who have now taken on almost total care for many long-term care participants. (**See** [Survey Stories](http://www.survivalcoalitionwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WI_COVID19_Stories_SurveyResults-first-name.docx) **from specific counties accompanying this release**).

 “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 that will allow for critical flexibilities such as 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.

“Adults and children with disabilities work hard to make intellectual and physical gains, and need consistent therapies and support to maintain skills. Without support, people with disabilities and families are watching hard-won progress and independence slip away,” said Beth Swedeen, Survival Coalition Co-Chair. “People needing in-home care are losing staff and family members – often elderly parents—are stepping in without respite or funding. It is critical that as the pandemic progresses, care workers receive wages and PPE that allow them to take on this vital health care and support.”

“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.”

 “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.

[Linked HERE](http://www.survivalcoalitionwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WI_COVID19_Stories_SurveyResults-first-name.docx) are stories and photos from Survival Coalition survey respondents organized by county. To arrange local interviews with people who are using long-term supports and experiencing additional stress and challenges during COVID, please contact a Co-Chair.

*Survival Coalition is 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.*

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Investing in People with Disabilities