



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

For Immediate Release, May 18, 2020

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Statewide Survival Coalition Survey Shows COVID Challenges Could Result in Shortage of Providers Supporting People with Disabilities and Older Adults

(Madison) – A statewide survey of more than 500 disability and older adult service providers by the Survival Coalition shows nearly 20% of these small businesses fear they are not financially sustainable as a result of COVID-19. The loss of any portion of these providers will only amplify the provider shortages that already exist and result in people not getting needed supports and services that keep them healthy and able to stay in their homes.

Hundreds of providers of disability services, located throughout all regions of Wisconsin, offer supports to people with disabilities and older adults living in the community, ranging from personal care in people’s homes, to coaching in community jobs, daily living skills training, prevocational and day activities, residential services and other supports.

More than 80% of the survey respondents are small businesses serving under 100 people and with staffs under 50. Among the survey’s findings:

- 72% are experiencing increased costs of doing business, including the need to purchase PPE and additional cleaning supplies, provide over-time or hazard pay, increase staff training, increase staff ratios because of physical distancing or because the people they serve are experiencing increased stress and anxiety.
- Most report revenue drops because of fewer people participating in services.
- Nearly one-fifth (18.5%) say they are not sure or not at all confident that their business is sustainable.
- Only 21% reported they are “very confident” their business is sustainable.

Survival Coalition, which is comprised of more than 30 statewide disability organizations, has the following recommendations for state policy makers to address the fragile community-based provider network in the state:

Recommendations:

- Identify home and community-based providers as essential health care workers.
- Ensure direct care workers are prioritized for PPE.
- Increase provider reimbursements to reflect added costs.
- Provide relief funding to bridge the impact on service revenue and business models.



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- Issue guidance on appropriate reopening practices for settings serving people with disabilities.
- Continue to fund virtual supports to provide personal choice in service delivery after the Safer at Home restrictions are lifted.
- Ensure long-term care participants have adequate technology to access necessary virtual supports.

Here are some quotes from the survey that illustrate common themes among the responses.

“The Coronavirus pandemic and the associated restrictions have had a significant impact on our staff and the people we support. There have been decreases in morale, mental and physical health, mental stimulation and social connections and opportunities. Anxiety and depression levels have increased as have behavioral issues. Social isolation, persistent changes in daily routines and limited availability to therapies have only served to exacerbate these issues.” – Group Home Provider

“We have higher expenses. We have fewer employees, but increased overtime, increased unemployment, increased costs of disinfecting and PPE supplies, and lost revenue due to adult family home openings not being filled due to no contact orders.” – Adult Family Home Provider

“We are now competing with unemployment rates that are double what we can offer per hour. New hires are impossible and staff total is dwindling.” – Provider

“We have experienced higher operating costs. Overtime has increased, staff are getting fatigued. The stress level and anxiety for everyone has increased. Financially, another 2 months, we may be facing the need to closing our facilities and go out of business completely.” – Residential Provider

“When we do start up there will be a significant cash flow problem due to emptying savings to get by. We won't see reimbursement of services for weeks after we begin but still have employee payroll and other expenses.” – Day Program Provider