

Governor's budget invests in care for people with disabilities, older adults

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Survival Coalition applauds the Governor for a strong budget for Wisconsin that recognizes the critical need to bolster caregivers who help people with disabilities and older adults living in the community, strong support for special education, investments in mental health, and focus on non-driver transportation.

Survival Coalition's 2022 statewide survey of family caregivers found family caregivers provide 80% of the care for children and adults with disabilities and older adults. 3 of 5 spend more than 40 hours – the equivalent of a full-time job—on caregiving duties.

"We have a double workforce crisis," said Patti Becker, Survival Co-Chair. "When there is no one to hire or care plans fall through, families are desperately trying to fill the gaps. Often, they can't." [Two out of three family caregivers are leaving the workforce](#) entirely or must cut down to part time hours, often sacrificing employee sponsored health care, retirement, and limiting lifetime earnings.

Allowing a wider circle of family members to take Family Medical Leave to provide care broadens the potential care network supporting the person and giving full-time working family caregivers up to 12 weeks paid Family Medical Leave helps keeps them in the workforce.

"Family Caregivers are working constantly behind the scenes and at all hours to meet the daily needs of people with disabilities and older adults, often while working and taking care of small children. It's hard and constant," said Beth Swedeen, Survival Co-Chair. "With this budget family caregivers finally feel seen. Caregiver Tax Credits, investment in respite, funding for ADRCs to expand caregiver support services, and continuing to implement the Caregiver Task Force recommendations, all of these are critical steps to support families."

The Governor's budget also provides money to increase the wages of paid direct support and personal care workers who many people with disabilities rely on to get out of bed, stay clean, and eat.

"These workers are literally the difference between living in your own home or a nursing home," said Patti Becker, Survival Co-Chair. "Family Care and IRIS were started to make sure people could live in their own homes and communities. You need care workers to make that happen and live up to the promise community inclusion."

"We also are thrilled with the Governor's proposal significantly increase the special education categorical aid reimbursement to 60% as well as the increases to high-cost special education aid," said Beth Swedeen, Survival Co-Chair. "Adequate funding for special education benefits all kids."

Survival Coalition [has documented](#) how being or becoming a non-driver impacts every aspect of a person's life. Non-drivers struggle every time they need to be somewhere in person, often needing days or weeks in advance to arrange rides and caregivers and spending hours waiting. Most non-drivers have

few transportation options and cannot affordably get where they need to go on time. Investments in mass transit and trying new approaches to regional transportation are critical.

“Getting across city or county lines is impossible most places. Where there is public transportation, it ends at the border. Many jobs, education, and health care centers serve large areas across a region,” said Kit Kerschensteiner. “We need to test different ways to provide affordable transportation when people need to cross city and county lines.”

The Governor’s designation of 2023 as the Year of Mental Health has prompted a new look at mental health in schools and a budget proposal to expand the school-based mental health aid by \$36 million across the biennium and include school counselors, psychologists, and nurses as well as social workers. There is also \$236 million across the biennium for comprehensive school mental health systems to help students with their mental health struggles, which have only been exacerbated by the pandemic and continue to worsen. “There is a need to invest enough resources in the mental health of Wisconsin’s children to make a real impact and this substantial investment is just what is needed” stated Kerschensteiner.

Survival Coalition also supports the Governor’s proposals to expand community-based mental health services, including support for peer run services, Medicaid Community Support Program funding, crisis services, and mental health services for individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind. “There has been a decreasing ability to access community-based mental health care over the past years and this has led to more and more people with mental illness ending up in facilities, jails or prisons said Kit Kerschensteiner. “We need to restore and improve the access people experiencing a mental health crisis have to the services they need to remain safely in the community and reduce reliance on overly restrictive inpatient and institutional settings.”

Survival Coalition appreciates inclusion of other important disability items including funding for the Children’s Long Term Care Support waiver so no children are left waiting for care.