



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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July X, 2013

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SURVIVAL COALITION ISSUES 2013-15 BIENNIAL BUDGET REPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The state's largest cross-disability coalition has issued its biennial budget report showing that other than significant improvements in supports for people with mental health disorders and some new funding for transportation, there were few positive gains for people with disabilities in the 2013-15 biennial budget.

The report assesses impacts on people with disabilities based on funding and policy decisions contained in the new budget. The analysis covers programs that impact people with various disabilities across their lifespan – including special education, child and adult long-term care, Medicaid, health care, employment, transportation, mental health, and the direct care workforce.

“Our coalition members made many recommendations to the legislature to influence improvements for people with disabilities in this budget,” says Maureen Ryan, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers and co-chair of the Survival Coalition. “The report clearly outlines where the legislature fell short.”

The report provides a “plus” or “minus” indicator to demonstrate whether various budget decisions responded to Survival Coalition requests to improve quality of life for people with disabilities. The Legislature's decision to provide Medicaid-funded health care to 80,000 new childless adults below the federal poverty line received a “plus” while their rejection of federal funds to cover more people with chronic disabling conditions and save considerable state tax dollars got a negative mark.

“We were glad to see the legislature reject the bad policy of creating a special needs voucher for students with disabilities,” says Beth Swedeen, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and co-chair of Survival. “However, we are disappointed that special education programming has gone without even a nominal funding increase for so many years. In addition, our ideas to promote better employment outcomes for people with disabilities should have been easy to include in this budget.”

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is a cross-disability coalition of more than 40 state and local organizations and groups. For more than 20 years, Survival has been focused on changing and improving policies and practices that support people with disabilities of all ages to be full participants in community life.

Survival Coalition members count other “wins” in the budget, including keeping transit in the segregated transportation fund - protecting these funds in future years, and an increase in paratransit funding. The Legislature did not address requests to reduce the number of children with significant disabilities waiting for long-term supports or to expand Family Care and IRIS supports to adult residents with disabilities and the elderly in seven northeast Wisconsin counties.

“We are pleased that finally mental health issues got attention in this budget,” says Kit Kerschensteiner, Managing Attorney for Disability Rights Wisconsin and co-chair of Survival. The budget funds various mental health initiatives including an Office of Children’s Mental Health, expanded Comprehensive Community Services (CCS) and peer run respite. “This new funding will go a long way toward improving the state of mental health care in Wisconsin.”

To read the entire budget report, go to: www.survivalcoalitionwi.org