



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

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New Wisconsin Plan Means Big and Better Changes for People with Disabilities 30-Day Public Comment Starts Today, July 30

(Madison) -- Wisconsin disability advocates are optimistic about a plan put out today by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) that could bring big changes to the way supports for people are provided and funded statewide.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services held a [stakeholder briefing](#) this morning to outline the plan and necessary changes they will make to the Family Care and other long-term care programs that are funded by Medicaid. A five-year transition plan is required by the federal government in all states to ensure that over that period states move forward to ensure that public funds for home and community-based services are not used in ways that isolate older adults and people with disabilities.

"The plan is an outline that should describe how people with disabilities will no longer spend time isolated from their community and from others without disabilities," says Beth Swedeen, Executive Director for the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and Survival Coalition co-chair. "Wisconsin's current system spends too many public dollars on segregated settings that do not lead to optimal health, independence, or financial self-sufficiency for people using the programs. We are hearing from people with disabilities and their family members that they want more choice in their lives and want to be full members of their communities."

DHS data on employment of people with disabilities shows that in 2012 the state spent \$65.5 million (75%) on segregated, facility-based employment compared to \$22.9 million on supporting people employed in competitive wage jobs in their communities. Most people with disabilities working in segregated facilities work only with others who have disabilities and earn less than minimum wage. More than half earn less than \$2 per hour, while those in integrated employment average more than \$8 per hour.

Over the last five years, the number of people with disabilities working in segregated facilities has increased by 17% and the number participating in segregated day programs has increased by 23%.

"It is no wonder we are lacking choice for individuals and families in communities across Wisconsin," says Kit Kerschensteiner, Managing Attorney with Disability Rights Wisconsin and Survival Coalition Co-chair. "The imbalance in funding alone should tell us something needs to change." Kerschensteiner says her agency routinely sees cases where youth go directly from school to a segregated sheltered workshop, which can set the young person's path for a lifetime, because community supports are just not available.

DHS' transition plan, similar to some other states', focuses on a schedule and deadlines for compliance but lacks clarity on the specifics. Wisconsin disability advocates say they were expecting more detail in

the plan and will take full advantage of the 30 day public comment period to help DHS improve their plan. DHS says comments are due by September 2.

“We would like to see standards and enforcement mechanisms for how the state will ensure that people are no longer isolated,” says Maureen Ryan, Executive Director for the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers and Co-Chair of Survival. “We absolutely want to see people with disabilities who believe in and want community integration directly involved in developing and implementing the plan all along the way.”

The Survival Coalition will advocate that Wisconsin’s transition plan fully implement the right to personal choice in an integrated setting imbedded in the new federal rules and address issues such as these:

- Many people with disabilities in Wisconsin say they don’t decide who they live with. Nearly 1/5 on those responding to a 2014 statewide self-advocate survey said they aren't allowed in parts of their own home.
- 21% of people with disabilities responding to a Wisconsin survey said they can’t choose things like their meals and their bedtime.
- A third of people with disabilities responding to a Wisconsin survey said they don’t have access to transportation to go where they want – to work, shopping or church.

People with disabilities, family members and professionals are encouraged to participate in the **Take A Stand On the Plan** campaign which helps people submit comments on Wisconsin’s transition plan. The website – <http://www.takeastandontheplan.org/index.html> - provides background information on the plan and an online tool. Comments are due to DHS by Sept. 2, 2014.

The Survival Coalition encourages everyone to [Take A Stand On The Plan](#) to promote a full community life for people with disabilities in Wisconsin.

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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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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