



Media Advisory: Join a Virtual Press Event to Hear How the State's Most Vulnerable People with Disabilities and Older Adults are Coping

For Immediate Release: April 21, 2020

Survival Coalition Co-Chair Contacts:

Lisa Pugh, pugh@thearc.org; (608) 422-4250

Beth Swedeon, beth.swedeon@wisconsin.gov; (608) 266-1166

Kristin M. Kerschensteiner, kitk@drwi.org; (608) 267-0214

COVID-19 is particularly dangerous to people with disabilities older adults, and people with chronic conditions. For these vulnerable individuals, it's critical to help them stay healthy and ensure they have the supports they need to stay out of the hospital and nursing homes. In Wisconsin more than 85,000 people rely on in-home personal care, home health, and many other services to stay in their own homes and out of expensive Medicaid-funded institutions.

Unfortunately, many people with disabilities are being left on the sidelines. People have lost critical services, their lives have changed in critical ways, the service system is not responding, and in many cases the caregiving burden has shifted to aging family members or there is no one able to step in as back up.

- **What:** People with Disabilities from across Wisconsin share their stories of the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic; Survival Coalition will share results from a statewide survey
- **When:** Thursday, April 23rd at 10 AM.
- **Where:** Register and participate via Zoom. Email: SurvivalCoalitionwi@gmail.com to receive the link.
- **Who:** The Media will hear directly from the following individuals:

Kristi Scheunemann, Watertown, Wisconsin

Kristi uses a wheelchair and requires daily personal cares from providers who cannot access personal protective equipment even though her respiratory issues put her at high risk for COVID-19. She has been forced to move home with her family and lose her employment.

Jason Endres, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Jason lives with his wife in Eau Claire and both use wheelchairs. He and his wife depend upon people coming to their home to help them with household chores and personal care. Care workers have stopped coming and now they are having difficulty even getting groceries delivered.

Stacy Ellingen, Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Stacy needs help with all of her basic needs such as toileting, showering, dressing, and feeding. She has lost all of her care workers during the crisis and was forced to move from her apartment. She cannot obtain Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and worries this will prevent her from being able to find reliable workers when she returns home.



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

Gladys Walker, Nekoosa, Wisconsin

Gladys' 5-year-old son is non-verbal and no longer has school services or needed therapies. He recently had a 107-degree fever but neither he nor his family members were able to get a COVID-19 test. It has been a struggle to keep her son engaged while the family is also balancing life with another young child at home.

Survey Summary:

The statewide survey includes responses from almost 500 people with disabilities and older adults. Respondents are from 78% of Wisconsin counties.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the isolation and vulnerabilities people with disabilities and older adults face. COVID-19 is amplifying the existing direct care workforce crisis, causing reductions and disruptions in needed services, and straining families to the breaking point as they try to fill in caregiving gaps, often while struggling to homeschool children and work from home.

Key Survey Findings:

- 40% worry if they get COVID-19 and are hospitalized they might not meet hospital triage criteria and may not get a ventilator because of age or disability.
- 37% report that families are providing some or all daily personal care support instead of their normal paid staff.
- All respondents are experiencing disruptions and reductions in the supports and services they need to stay healthy or allow family members to work; including losing personal care and home health care, transportation to essential businesses and medical appointments, prescription drugs and durable medical supplies, therapies that are needed to stay or become more independent.
- Thinking about the next two weeks, people are very or extremely concerned being unable to get help if there is a medical emergency, not knowing what to do if they are not getting the help they need, losing their care workers, and losing the routine care needed to maintain health.

Note on this survey

The people responding to this survey are isolated, but they are among the most connected members of the disability and older adult community who use Family Care, IRIS, and other programs.

These survey takers have internet access, e-mail addresses or social media accounts, and are more likely to have family members able to assist them. Many people across the state are alone, and do not have anyone to reach out to for help. Many have limited or no access to computers, internet access, and even phones.

In Wisconsin, 37% of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities do not have a phone or smart phone and 17% don't have other ways to connect with people.

###

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.