

Survival Coalition survey shows Impact of COVID-19 on people with disabilities, older adults, families, and direct care workforce

Almost 500 people with disabilities and older adults representing nearly 80% of Wisconsin counties responded to Survival Coalition's COVID-19 survey.

"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," said Lisa Pugh, Survival Coalition Co-Chair.

COVID-19 is particularly dangerous to older adults, people with disabilities, and people with chronic conditions. In Wisconsin 36.5% of adults (1,612,619 people) are at high risk of serious illness if infected by COVID-19¹. People living in congregant settings like nursing homes and group homes are at higher risk.²

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 hospitals and nursing homes.

"People are losing critical services that help keep them home and out of the path of the virus. They are worried about their workers and family caregivers getting sick, and what happens to them if caregivers do fall ill," said Beth Swedeen, Survival Coalition Co-Chair. "Many fear the small local businesses that provide the in-home support they rely on will become secondary casualties in the pandemic. In some areas of the state, there may be no support options left if provider organizations do not survive."

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.

"The people who took this survey have internet access, e-mail addresses or social media accounts, and are more likely to have family members," said Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival Coalition Co-Chair. "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. These folks are at risk from COVID-19, and at risk of falling through the cracks in the service system³."

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

¹ <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/how-many-adults-are-at-risk-of-serious-illness-if-infected-with-coronavirus/>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/groups-at-higher-risk.html#nursing-homes-or-long-term-care-facilities>

³ 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 according to National Core Indicators data.



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

- 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 get to essential businesses and medical appointments, prescription drugs and durable medical supplies, therapies that are needed to stay or become more independent.
- In 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 careworkers, and losing the routine care needed to maintain health.