



## Key Questions for Candidates for State Office

In 2018, Wisconsin voters will head to the polls to elect state offices including Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, State Senators (odd-numbered districts) and Assembly Representatives. The 2018 Wisconsin primary is August 14<sup>th</sup> and the general election is November 6<sup>th</sup>.

Election season is an important time to educate the candidates and the community about disability issues. There are more than 643,000 Wisconsinites with disabilities - 12% of the state's population. Many people with disabilities rely on programs and services funded by the state to support them in maintaining their health, accessing education and employment, and participating in their communities.

### HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT TO EDUCATE CANDIDATES

- Post questions and stories to a candidate's social media account
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper
- Ask a question at a candidate forum or town hall
- Invite a candidate to your local organization's meeting
- Send an email to the candidate's campaign

### HOW TO FIND YOUR CANDIDATES

Find out who is on your ballot at: MyVote Wisconsin, <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/>

Find candidate websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and more at:

<https://www.wisconsinvote.org/>

## Seven Key Questions to Ask State Candidates

### #1 Investing in Adult Long-Term Care Services and Supports

**Question:** How will you protect Wisconsin's significant investments in long-term care programs that provide community-based supports that let older adults and people with disabilities remain in their homes and reduce costly institutional care?

**Background:** 65,000 Wisconsinites are in one of Wisconsin's community-based long-term care programs (Family Care, IRIS, PACE, Partnership), which serve older adults, people with physical disabilities, and people with developmental disabilities. These programs that keep people living in their communities are cost effective; on the average, costs for community supports are significantly less than institutional care, which can cost more than \$800 per day.

### #2 Supporting Education for Students with Disabilities

**Question:** Special Education Categorical Aid funding has not been increased in Wisconsin for almost a decade. What will you do to ensure our neighborhood public schools have the resources to improve outcomes for students with disabilities so they are career and college ready?

**Background:** Approximately 116,000 or 14.5 % of all Wisconsin students receive special education services. Funding has remained flat for over a decade. Parents report significant erosion of quality education for students with disabilities. Just over 13% of students with disabilities are proficient in reading and math, and students with disabilities are three times more likely to be suspended compared to their regular education peers.

### #3 Protecting Medicaid

**Question:** What are your plans to strengthen Wisconsin's Medicaid program and protect against drastic cuts that could jeopardize services that children and adults with disabilities rely upon, such as personal care, Katie Beckett, the Children's Long Term Support Program, Family Care, IRIS, and Comprehensive Community Services (CCS)?

**Background:** 1.1 million state residents are served by Wisconsin's Medicaid-related programs including 222,608 residents who have disabilities. Medicaid allows eligible people with disabilities to receive critical supports like help with meals, medications, dressing, community participation and employment.

### #4 Prioritizing Employment

**Question:** Do you support integrated employment as the first and preferred outcome for all working age citizens with disabilities? How would you address the high unemployment rate of this population?

**Background:** Only 35% of working-age adults with disabilities in the U.S. are employed compared with 76% of working-age people without disabilities. Among people with disabilities in Wisconsin's Long-Term Care system (Family Care/IRIS) only 11.4% are working in competitive-wage jobs, and 72% are not working at all.

### #5 Improving Transportation

**Question:** How will you improve accessible and affordable transportation—including shared rides, public transit, and commuter options—for people with disabilities?

**Background:** People with disabilities are not able to get where they need to go on their schedule, and transportation is identified as their number one concern. Community employment, staying healthy, and independently taking care of personal business depends on reliable and routine access to transportation, yet there are significant gaps in transportation services for people with disabilities throughout Wisconsin.

### #6 Addressing the Workforce Shortage

**Question:** What steps will you take to address the community-based direct care workforce crisis so that people have access to personal care and home health workers?

**Background:** There is a crisis-level shortage of community-based direct care workers in Wisconsin. These workers (personal care, home health) are essential for people with disabilities and older adults to lead safe and healthy lives in the community. Community-based direct care workers also prevent unnecessary hospitalizations or re-admissions, which helps reduce health care costs. The worker shortages in nursing homes and hospitals has received attention, however, similar investments are needed in the community.

### #7 Expanding Mental Health Systems and Supports

**Question:** How will you support Wisconsin's system of community-based mental health services and supports for adults and children? How will you ensure people living with serious mental illness have the mental health services they need to live as independently as possible in the community?

**Background:**

*An estimated 21% of Wisconsin's children have a mental illness.* Some children receive mental health services through other public systems or through private insurance, but a treatment gap of about 34% remains.

*An estimated 18.44% of Wisconsin adults (807,000) have a diagnosable mental illness.* An annual average of about 360,000 adults aged 18 or older with any mental illness (45.2%) from 2011 to 2015 received mental health services.