



Key Questions for Candidates for State Office

In 2020, Wisconsin voters will head to the polls to elect a U.S. President, in addition to important state offices: even-numbered district Wisconsin State Senate seats, all Wisconsin Assembly seats, and all District Attorneys. The 2020 Wisconsin partisan primary is August 11th and the general election is November 3rd.

Election season is an important time to educate the candidates and the community about disability issues. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [1 in 4 adults in the US](#) has a disability, including impairments with vision, hearing, mobility, and cognition. 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, myvote.wi.gov/en-us
Find candidate websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and more at:
www.wisconsinvote.org/ and www.vote411.org

Ten Key Questions to Ask State Candidates

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

Question: How will you ensure that people with disabilities and older adults can continue to live and work in their communities and stay out of expensive Medicaid-funded institutions, such as nursing homes?

Background: 74,000 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 received a nominal increase in the last state budget, the first in a decade, but is still nowhere near the original promise of 60% state support. Schools are now incurring additional costs related to the pandemic. 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 and do not fall further behind?

Background: Approximately 116,000 or 14% of all Wisconsin students receive special education services. Parents report significant erosion of quality education for students with disabilities; the limits of education during the pandemic threaten to exacerbate already significant gaps. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores show Wisconsin eighth grade reading scores for students with disabilities are 48 points lower than students without disabilities. 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 the right of people with disabilities to access competitive, community-based employment, with sufficient supports to succeed? How would you address the high unemployment rate of this population that existed even before the COVID-19 pandemic, and has risen sharply since?

Background: The number of working-age people with disabilities who are employed has decreased significantly during the pandemic, a 17% reduction as of May. A year ago, in 2019, 19% of people with a disability were employed, compared to 66% for people without a disability. Among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Wisconsin's Long-Term Care system (Family Care/IRIS) only 16% are working in competitive-wage jobs, 55% who are not working would like a paid job.

5. Improving Transportation

Question: People with physical, mental health, or intellectual/developmental disabilities, older adults, and low-income workers who cannot afford to maintain personal vehicles, students, and adults who prefer not to drive.

Background: Non-drivers are not able to get where they need to go on their schedule; transportation barriers affect large segments of the population across Wisconsin, and is the number one concern of people with disabilities. Lack of transportation impacts people's job choices, housing options, medical care, and ability to independently conduct personal business. Few or no transportation options limit workforce mobility and economic development.

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.

8. Support for Children with Disabilities and their Families

Question: Families who have children with disabilities need help finding and accessing resources and supports. What will you do to ensure families get information about supports and services and all eligible children receive help?

Background: 1 in 10 children with disabilities, almost 1200, who are eligible for home and community supports and services are waiting for funding. They are the only Medicaid population without access to services due to funding. Many families who have children with disabilities talk about how hard it is to find help. When families have access to the right services, information, and assistance, their success increases. Supporting families prevents crisis and the need for more costly services. Supporting families includes one statewide name and number for access to information, assistance, and eligibility determination. We have Aging and Disability Resource Centers for adults and seniors and need a similar resource for families and children.

9. Medicaid Block Grants

Question: What do you think about proposals to revamp the Medicaid program to a new model using block grants?

Background: Medicaid block grants would provide states with a fixed amount of federal funding for Medicaid instead of guaranteeing federal "matching" funds for every eligible child and adult, including people with disabilities and older adults. Some states have tried to get Medicaid block grants. Some people think block grants would give states more choices. But other people think block grants would hurt people with disabilities. Less people would get Medicaid, and more people would get put on waiting lists.

10. Special Education

Question: Will you help to make sure the government pays its fair share of the cost for The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) within Special Education?

Background: The IDEA says the U.S. governments will pay schools to help students with disabilities. IDEA says they will pay 40% of the costs, but right now, the U.S. government only pay for 14% of the costs.