



Key Questions for Congressional Candidates

2022 is an important election year. Wisconsin voters will elect a U.S. Senator, as well as electing U.S. Congressional Representatives. The 2022 Wisconsin partisan primary is August 9th, and the general election is November 8th.

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 federal government 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

Find candidate websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and more at: www.wisconsinvote.org and www.vote411.org

Key Questions to Ask Congressional Candidates

1. Medicaid Programs and Services

Question: What are your plans to protect Medicaid programs and services that many people with disabilities and their families rely on for health care, long-term care, and other critical services?

Background: People with disabilities account for 15% of total Medicaid enrollment in Wisconsin. Medicaid covers more than 30% of working age adults with disabilities. More than half of Medicaid enrollees live below the federal poverty level. Medicaid allows eligible people with disabilities to receive long term supports like help with meals, medications, dressing, rehabilitation services, community participation and employment.

2. SSI and SSDI Programs

Question: What are your plans to preserve the long-term sustainability of SSI and SSDI programs that many people with disabilities rely on as a source of income to pay for housing, food, and other living expenses? Will you support proposals to adjust benefits annually to allow for inflation and to update asset limits?

Background: 13.8 million disabled people under age 65 rely on SSI, SSDI, or both for survival, yet many of the programs' beneficiaries still live below the poverty line. SSI has many rules that make it hard for people to save money and get out of poverty. SSI has an asset limit that has not been updated since 1989. It has never been increased for inflation.

3. Paid and Unpaid Caregivers

Question: How will you address the critical shortage of paid and unpaid caregivers for people with disabilities?

Background: In Wisconsin, a shortage of paid caregivers has resulted in a workforce crisis. 70% of personal care agencies are unable to staff all hours needed, 93% of agencies find it difficult to fill jobs, and the annual turnover rate ranges from 50% to 67%. 95% of Wisconsinites with disabilities who rely on paid caregivers to be able to get out of bed, eat, dress, get to work etc. report they have trouble finding workers and 85% do not have enough workers to cover all their shifts.

40% of the people receiving caregiving from unpaid caregivers are people with disabilities. In Wisconsin, an estimated 549,000 informal caregivers are providing 588,000 million hours of care, valued at nearly \$6 billion dollars. Families across the state often have to rearrange schedules and even leave their jobs to fill in caregiving gaps.

4. Affordable Housing

Question: What will you do to expand access to affordable, accessible housing for low-income people with disabilities?

Background: 41% of working age public housing tenants have a disability; HUD Section 811, Section 8, and Public Housing programs are all critical sources of affordable housing for people with disabilities but are in short supply and high demand.

5. Access to Mental Health Services

Question: What will you do to reduce the number of people with mental illness in our jails and prisons, to promote diversion of people with mental illness from the criminal justice system, and to increase access to community mental health services.

Background: Far too many people who live with a mental illness are in jails or prisons, often due to inadequate access to mental health services and supports. Jails and prisons are not designed to provide mental health care or to help people to recover.

6. Employment in the Community

Question: Do you support the right of people with disabilities to find and keep competitive wage, community-based jobs, with the right supports to be successful? How will you address the high unemployment rate among people with disabilities 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. In 2019, 19% of people with a disability were employed, compared to 66% for people without a disability.

7. Disability Rights

Question: Do you agree that people with disabilities have the same rights as citizens without disabilities? Will you preserve the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)—the civil rights bill for people with disabilities—from attacks and ensure the ADA is enforced?

Background: People with disabilities face accessibility barriers daily that determine whether they can enter a building, can move between floors of a building, use the bathroom, vote and other simple considerations that impact where people with disabilities can go and what they can do. People with disabilities rely on the ADA to ensure they can access public places, including businesses, just like people without disabilities can.

8. Special Education

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

9. Voting Rights

Question: What will you do to protect the rights of people with disabilities to register to vote, vote by mail, and vote at their polling place, and to have access to disability related accommodations that are protected by federal law?

Background: People with disabilities often experience barriers to voting including lack of photo ID (many are non-drivers due to disability), inaccessible polling places, limited access to transportation, health or disability related concerns that prevent them from voting in person, lack of an accessible absentee ballot, and discrimination – election workers who deny legally required accommodations. Federal law requires that people with disabilities have equitable access to voting and provides specific protections such as the right for a person with a disability to have assistance from a person of their choice with voting.