



# Key Questions for Candidates for State Office

In 2022, Wisconsin voters will head to the polls to elect important state offices including Governor, Lieutenant Governor, odd-numbered district Wisconsin State Senate seats, and all Wisconsin Assembly seats. The 2022 Wisconsin partisan primary is August 9th, and the Fall 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 disabling condition, 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](https://myvote.wi.gov)

Find candidate websites, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and more at: [www.vote411.org/wisconsin](https://www.vote411.org/wisconsin)

## 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:** Over 80,000 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 keep people living in their communities and 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. Sustaining Medicaid

**Question:** Do you support fully funding the Wisconsin programs that people 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)? If not, why not?

**Background:** 1.1 million state residents are served by Wisconsin's Medicaid-related programs including 266,000 residents enrolled in Elderly, Blind, Disabled (EBD) Medicaid. Medicaid allows eligible people with disabilities to receive long term supports like help with meals, medications, dressing, rehabilitation services, community participation and employment.

## 4. Prioritizing Employment

**Question:** Do you think people with disabilities should have enough supports so they can find and keep jobs in the community at the same wages as those without disabilities? What ideas do you have to address the high unemployment of 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. 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:** How will you improve Wisconsin's transportation systems to meet the needs of non-drivers?

**Background:** One-third of Wisconsinites are non-drivers. The number of non-drivers is increasing and includes people with disabilities, older adults, low-income workers who cannot afford or do not have access to a vehicle, people who prefer not to drive, and people without a driver's license. Non-drivers are not able to get where they need to go on their schedule. Lack of affordable, reliable transportation options impacts workforce mobility, economic development, people's job choices, housing options, medical care, and ability to independently conduct personal business.

## 6. Addressing the Workforce Shortage

**Question:** What steps will you take to address Wisconsin's community-based direct care workforce crisis, the pressure it puts upon family caregivers and emergency services, and barriers it creates to ensuring people with disabilities and elderly have access to authorized and essential services?

**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. Low reimbursement rates for community-based care create hourly wages that keep workers in poverty, as well as prohibit the employers from participating in available workforce stability programs. This essential workforce prevents unnecessary hospitalizations or re-admissions, leading to reduced overall health care costs. While the worker shortages in nursing homes and hospitals have received attention, equal investments are needed for the community-based workforce.

## 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:** 56,000 children in Wisconsin are significantly impacted by long-term disabilities. Their families talk about how hard it is to find the information and help they need to support their child. When families have access to the right help, information, and assistance, their success increases. Supporting families prevents crisis and the need for more costly services. Supporting families must include a statewide "front door" for access to information, assistance, and eligibility determination. We have Aging and Disability Resource Centers for adults and seniors, but they do not serve families who have children with disabilities. We need a similar resource for families and children.

## 9. Voting Rights

**Question:** What will you do to improve the accessibility of voting in Wisconsin, and to protect the rights of people with disabilities to register to vote, vote by mail, and vote at their polling place, and have access to disability related accommodations?

**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.

## 10. Housing

**Question:** What is your plan to increase access to accessible, affordable housing and to support Housing First for community members who are experiencing homelessness?

**Background:** Many people with disabilities struggle to find accessible affordable housing. A high percentage of those who experience housing insecurity or homelessness have significant mental health needs and/or other disabilities.

## 11. Justice System

**Question:** What actions should Wisconsin take to reduce incarceration of people with mental illness, divert them from the criminal justice system and connect them to treatment and supports?

**Background:** People with mental illness are overrepresented in our criminal justice systems. Conservative estimates suggest that over 50% of the prison and jail population have a history of mental illness and/or substance abuse. Wisconsin youth with a mental health diagnosis are overrepresented throughout the juvenile justice system. For example, March 2016 data from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections indicated that at least 70 percent of the then current population at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake could be classified as having one or more disabilities; the majority having a mental health diagnosis or emotional disorder.