

Independence in Our Communities, Regardless of Age or Ability

Wisconsin can build a future where people with disabilities and older adults have the choice and support to remain in their homes and communities.

People should not have to leave their homes or communities simply because they acquire a disability, grow older or need assistance with everyday activities.

That principle is increasingly important for Wisconsin. The state's population is aging, with nearly 1.7 million Wisconsinites projected to be age 60 or older by 2030. At the same time, people with disabilities of every generation continue to face barriers to accessible housing, reliable transportation, caregivers and the home and community-based services that make independent living possible.

The Wisconsin Independent Living Network (WILN)—Wisconsin's eight disability-led Independent Living Centers, the Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers and the Independent Living Council of Wisconsin—is calling for policies that strengthen choice, independence and community living across the lifespan.

The 2027–2029 legislative session is the time to ensure Wisconsin's long-term care and community support systems are sufficient in quality and capacity now and for the future.

CARE: Strengthen the supports that make independent living possible.

For many people with disabilities and older adults, the right services at the right time can make the difference between remaining in the community and entering a more restrictive setting.

WILN calls on Wisconsin to:

- Invest in Independent Living Centers and transition services that help people move successfully from hospitals and nursing facilities back into the community.
- Protect access to home and community-based services under Medicaid.
- Develop a long-term care insurance option for people who need assistance to remain at home but do not qualify for Medicaid-funded long-term care.
- Address the caregiver workforce crisis by modernizing nurse supervision requirements and establishing reimbursement rates that better reflect the cost of providing care.

- Ensure Family Care resources support community living and protect the self-direction and individual choice at the heart of the IRIS program.

MOBILITY: Make independence possible beyond the front door.

A home in the community is only truly independent when people can access the rest of that community.

Reliable transportation connects people with health care, groceries, employment, education, family, friends and civic life. For many people with disabilities, older adults and other non-drivers, transportation is an essential part of remaining independent.

WILN calls on Wisconsin to:

- Increase and stabilize funding for local and specialized transportation.
- Allow greater coordination and braiding of transportation funding so riders can make practical, efficient trips without navigating separate systems for different destinations.
- Allow communities to establish regional transportation authorities that can coordinate transportation services and funding across municipal boundaries.

HOUSING: Build communities where people can remain at home as their needs change.

Accessible housing benefits people throughout their lives. A home designed to accommodate changing mobility needs can support a person with a disability today, allow someone to remain independent after an injury or illness tomorrow, and make it possible for an older adult to age in place.

WILN calls on Wisconsin to:

- Establish basic visitability standards for new housing, including accessible entrances, first-floor living options and wider doorways.
- Create incentives to convert existing inaccessible homes into accessible housing.
- Encourage accessible and affordable homeownership through tools including property-tax incentives for accessibility modifications and a statewide community land trust model.

The Goal: Choice, Independence and Community

Long-term care policy ultimately concerns more than programs and funding streams. It is central to **where and how Wisconsinites are able to live their lives.**

Disability can be part of life at any age. And as Wisconsin's population grows older, more individuals and families will confront questions about accessibility, transportation, caregiving and long-term support.

Wisconsin can prepare now.

By strengthening home and community-based services, addressing the caregiver workforce, improving transportation and expanding accessible housing, Wisconsin can help ensure that people with disabilities and older adults have meaningful choices about where they live and the support they receive.

WILN asks Wisconsin's policymakers to make community living a priority in the 2027–2029 biennium—and to work with people with disabilities, older adults and the Independent Living Network to build systems that support independence across the lifespan.