



# Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

---

*P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707*

## ***After Joint Finance Hearing Disability and Aging Participants and other Stakeholders Are Still Left Asking: What's the Plan for People with Disabilities and Older Adults?***

(MADISON) -- After weeks of questions about the major changes proposed to Wisconsin's long-term care system in the 2015-17 state budget, disability and aging stakeholders were disappointed that Secretary Rhoades of the Department of Health Services (DHS) could not answer key questions about the future of Family Care/IRIS and county-run Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) at Tuesday night's Joint Finance budget briefing.

The proposed 2015-17 state budget would make sweeping changes in Wisconsin's nationally admired and cost-effective long-term care system. IRIS, the largest self-directed Medicaid program in the country, is eliminated in the budget as a free standing program and rolled into Family Care, and DHS is given authority to change the current Family Care program.

Family Care and IRIS currently serve nearly 55,000 older adults and individuals with developmental or physical disabilities, all of whom qualify for a nursing home level of care. These programs, unlike acute and primary health care, provide daily personal supports that help people with disabilities live independently and lead active, meaningful lives in the community.

"There was no assurance that people will be able to keep their doctors or providers under this proposal," said Beth Swedeen, Survival co-chair. "IRIS participants still have many questions about how the Department would fold independent self-direction into a more structured managed care system."

"The Department did not provide substantive details on what changes will result to long-term care if the budget is passed, or offer adequate insight on how these proposed changes would be implemented," said Maureen Ryan, Survival co-chair. "People who depend on these programs to live independently deserve to know what is about to happen to the programs they rely on. There are still too many unknowns."

"Wisconsin's current long-term care programs have already produced significant cost savings while maintaining high quality care. The Department did not provide any data or studies to indicate that changing the current system would produce specific savings," said Kit Kerschensteiner, Survival co-chair. "Integrated care has merits, but our current model already can integrate health and long-term care, without throwing out our whole system. It doesn't make sense to adopt an unknown model. As we are hearing from many long-term care participants, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.'"

People in 57 of Wisconsin's 72 counties now have access to comprehensive supports through Family Care/IRIS, with an additional 7 counties transitioning into these programs. Thanks to Family Care/IRIS, reliance on costly nursing homes and other institutions has been dramatically reduced, and adult waiting lists for home-based support have been eliminated in Family Care/IRIS counties.

Even though Family Care/IRIS is not fully implemented statewide, the programs have generated tremendous savings to the Medicaid budget while improving health and the quality of people's lives. The proportion of Medicaid spending going toward long-term care as compared to other Medicaid programs has actually reduced under Family Care/IRIS.

While DHS may not be able to answer any questions about the future of Wisconsin's long-term care system, the demonstrated cost savings, high satisfaction ratings, and overall health outcomes of participants as compared with other states show that the current system is working. Here are some facts about the current system:

- As Family Care and IRIS expanded throughout the state, spending on long-term care declined by 10%.
- Annual Medicaid nursing home days dropped from 8.8 million in 2002 to 5.7 million in 2012, a 35% reduction saving taxpayers well over \$300 million/year.
- The number of older adults in WI nursing homes has decreased by 9,000 since the reforms were put in place.
- The portion of the overall Medicaid budget spent on nursing homes dropped from 62% to 31% over the same period.
- In 2013, Legislative Fiscal Bureau projected that expanding Family Care and IRIS statewide (using the current models) would save Wisconsin taxpayers approximately \$34 million over the next 10 years.
- 97% of IRIS participants report that they value the relationship with their IRIS consultant and the way they are supported to solve problems and reach their goals.
- 95% of current Family Care participants report being happy with the quality of services they receive "always" or "most of the time".

Maureen Ryan, [moryan@charter.net](mailto:moryan@charter.net); (608) 444-3842;  
Beth Swedeen, [beth.swedeen@wisconsin.gov](mailto:beth.swedeen@wisconsin.gov); (608) 266-1166;  
Kristin M. Kerschensteiner, [kitk@drwi.org](mailto:kitk@drwi.org); (608) 267-0214

---

*Survival Coalition Issue Teams: education, employment, housing, long term care for adults, long term care for children, mental health, transportation, workforce, voting, Medicaid and health care.*

---