



# Save IRIS

[www.saveiris.org](http://www.saveiris.org)

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## **People with disabilities and elderly Wisconsin residents remain very concerned about the elimination of key program.**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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State agency testimony by DHS to the Joint Finance Committee on Tuesday did not alleviate the fears of the more than 11,000 people with disabilities and older adults who rely on the state's long-term care program called IRIS.

On Tuesday DHS was grilled with questions about the elimination of the IRIS program but could provide no firm details of how it would look in the future.

"Imagine if you are caring for a young adult with a disability and all you want is their secure future as you get older," says Meg Steimle of Wauwatosa and a member of Save IRIS. "I did not hear that IRIS would not change for our family. I need more assurance than that and so do many other people. This is very scary for us."

IRIS is a unique self-directed, community-based, long-term care program for older adults and people with disabilities. IRIS participants self-direct their services and supports within an authorized budget based upon their needs and outcomes. They directly hire people that they trust to provide services, such as personal care, meal preparation, help accessing the community, and employment supports. Without these cost-effective supports, many people would not be able to stay in their homes and would require more costly institutional care.

The biennial budget eliminates the program but indicates people would be able to join the state's larger managed care program called Family Care, which will now be run by huge for-profit insurance companies. Self-direction of supports under Family Care is vastly different in design and practical application, as a [comparison chart](#) shows.

"I do not see how a large insurance company allows me to have choices about what's right for my life," says Abigail Tessmann of Madison, "There are too many unknowns about these drastic changes in the budget. There are too many people affected to push this through in just a few weeks."

IRIS participants and their families say they received no warnings about the changes and were not asked to provide input.

Tuesday DHS cancelled all public long-term care council meetings until July. Long-term care council meetings are the only time stakeholders are brought to the table to advise the Department on programs and services for older adults and people with disabilities.

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*"Save IRIS" is a coalition of IRIS participants and their allies dedicated to preserving IRIS, Wisconsin's only long-term care option that allows participants to completely self-direct their supports and services.*