

April 24, 2025

Statement by Wisconsin Aging and Disability Programs Funded by Administration on Community Living

Wisconsin aging and disability programs funded through the Administration for Community Living, and authorized through the Older Americans Act and Rehabilitation Act and Developmental Disabilities Bill of Rights Act stand in opposition to the elimination of programs and funding cuts proposed by the federal Office of Management and Budget for federal fiscal year 2026.

On April 16, 2025, a document from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), entitled, “Department of Health and Human Services 2026 Discretionary Budget Passback” was leaked to the media. The document included the list of programs proposed for elimination or significant funding cuts in the President’s 2026 Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget. These potential cuts to programs that millions of older adults, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities rely on would result in devastating consequences.

The White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is recommending the total elimination of many disability and aging programs that serve every state and territory, including:

- State Developmental Disability Councils – in WI this is the **Board for People With Developmental Disabilities**, or BPDD
- Developmental Disabilities Protection and Advocacy agencies – in WI this is **Disability Rights Wisconsin**, or DRW
- Long Term Care Ombudsman programs – in WI this is the **Board on Aging and Long Term Care**, or BOALTC
- **State Health Insurance Assistance Programs**, or SHIP
- **Lifespan Respite Care**
- **Elder Justice and Adult Protective Services** programs
- **Aging and Disability Resource Centers** discretionary funding
- **The University Centers for Excellence** at Waisman Center in WI
- **Voting Access for People with Disabilities**
- Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III D Evidence-Based Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, including **Elder Falls Prevention** and **Chronic Disease Self-Management** education

This proposal is not a final decision, but it is a clear communication about intent. This proposal would eliminate funding for advocates charged under federal law to help people with disabilities and older adults express and be guaranteed their rights. Eliminating independent advocate voices and capacity for enforcement of disability and aging rights has the potential to impact the health, safety and well-being of millions. This would take us back to days when older and disabled persons had no options other than expensive nursing homes, and to a time when a lack of oversight and advocacy led to mistreatment, excessive disability, and death.

The proposal also calls for significant reductions in federal staff responsible for the administration and oversight of aging and disability programs and services through the elimination of the Administration for Community Living (ACL), and restructuring these programs within the

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Splitting up these core Older Americans Act programs across different DHHS agencies makes essential partnerships and collaborations an impediment to effective advocacy and smooth systems management. Additionally, the proposal directs significant dollars to states to manage these programs as part of Independent Living programming. This move places undo hardship on Designated State Entities overseeing IL Services, and eliminates the very supports they would need at the federal level to successfully deliver on the intent of the eliminated programs. Congress would have to agree to these changes if they become part of the President's budget proposal for next year. Public hearings to determine their impact are needed before these programs are considered for elimination.

What do these disability and aging programs do?

- Respond to allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation; ensure a responsive investigation, prosecution of perpetrators, due process and crime victims' supports.
 - Support older adults and people living with disabilities in living independently and actively, avoiding unnecessary and expensive placement in long-term care.
 - By ensuring the least restrictive environment for care and support, advocates also ensure the best stewardship of the financial resources of the state and federal government.
 - Provide oversight and advocacy to persons living in long-term care settings when quality of care and quality of life fall below consumer needs and expectations.
 - Connect people with disabilities and older adults to programs such as Medicaid or children's long-term care in every county.
 - Provide Medicare counseling, assist with benefit denials, and provide oversight to unethical practices.
 - Remove state and local barriers to voting for eligible older people and adults living with disabilities.
 - Through education, support and respite services, prevent burnout among family caregivers, many of whom work outside the home while also serving as the primary caregiver for a loved one. Minimize the risks of abuse and premature institutionalization by supporting unpaid caregivers so they, too, can live a balanced life.
 - Ensure that older and disabled persons who cannot leave their homes, or those who can travel to a congregate mealsite, receive a hot, nutritious meal each day.
 - Prevent unnecessary and restrictive guardianships by helping vulnerable Wisconsinites learn skills and find trusted people to help them with decisions.
 - Provide evidence-based health promotion programs offering solutions to self-managing chronic conditions and falls risk.
 - Advise governors, the President, and state legislatures and members of Congress about the impacts and often unintended consequences of laws and policies on older adults and people with disabilities, and advocate for improvements to programs such as Medicaid and special education.
 - Challenge illegal discrimination and ensure that people with disabilities have access to basic life necessities like health care, housing, jobs and education.
 - Conduct research and evaluation to understand causes of chronic diseases, their impacts and interventions. Promote and train students to want to work in health, education, and social service systems.
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- Together, these vital and informed agencies improve access to employment, health, food security, housing and transportation. They take steps to ensure laws and rules increase safety and independence, and minimize premature and expensive admissions to long-term

care settings while also working toward best health outcomes through systems improvement. They also decrease healthcare costs and reduce burden on public safety resources, and on individuals and their families.

Advocacy agencies exist to protect people's access and rights to participate in their communities, and help communities to build programs that enable productive, meaningful lives. Collectively, these partner agencies advocate for improved public programs and laws that keep vulnerable Wisconsinites living healthy, safe lives in their communities, as well as create a system of autonomy and accountability. We are concerned that the actions in this proposal will weaken the strong partnerships and clear goals of our mutual organizations.

We encourage you to contact your state and federal legislators to ask them to stand up for the rights, health and safety of older and disabled persons in need of vital long-term care services and supports, asking them to say no to the dismantling and de-funding of these programs.

- Jill Jacklitz, Executive Director, Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW), (608) 658-2224
- Jessica Trudell, Executive Director, WI Board on Aging and Long-Term Care (BOALTC), 800-815-0015
- Beth Swedeen, Executive Director, WI Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD), (608) 220-2924
- Janet Zander, Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator, Great Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR) (608) 228-7253
- Lisa Schneider, Executive Director, Respite Care Association of WI (RCAW) (608) 222-2033
- Leann DaWalt, Director, Waisman Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, (608) 263-1656
- Jason Glozier, Executive Director, WI Coalition of Independent Living Centers (WCILC), (608) 422-0525
- Jill Henken, Executive Director, Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging, (715) 340-4866