

Use the following talking points to describe the problem you want your elected official to understand. Share the part of your family story that best illustrates your family's experience with the problem. And be sure to include **YOUR ASK**—This is what you want your elected official to do.

Support Families by Creating a Statewide Disability Resource Center

The Problem

Families struggle daily to navigate complex systems such as health care, long-term supports, education, community resources, and Medicaid. The lack of information and support can lead to family crises like lost jobs, lost opportunities for child development, and lost economic stability.

Facts

- 56,000 children in Wisconsin have a disability requiring long-term supports.
- Only 25% of these children are connected to a long-term support program.
- 1-in-4 families of children with disabilities live below the Federal Poverty Level, compared to 1-in-6 without children with disabilities.
- Over one-half of these families report financial hardship.
- 1-in-4 have had to cut back or stop working to care for their children.
- 1-in-4 report high levels of stress compared to 1-in-20 of families without children with disabilities.
- Current information and assistance resources serve roughly 5% of these families.

Talking Points

- The Wisconsin Legislature made a commitment to adults with disabilities and seniors by funding Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) in every county. But **ADRC's don't serve children**.
- Wisconsin has no statewide, coordinated effort to connect children with disabilities and families to information, assistance, and services.
- By supplying families with the right information, training and navigation assistance, they will become more resilient, and their success will increase.
- Without these services and supports the only option for a family who has critical needs may be to place their child **out of home** either in an institution or specialized foster care.
- Supporting families maximizes the use of the existing community, health and school-based supports.

Solution

Invest in families by establishing a statewide Disability Resource Center for Children and Families so families know where to get help and can get the help they need.

The statewide [Disability Resource Center for Children and Families](#) will offer:

- Information, assistance, and resource navigators to help families find available community resources, programs, and services.
- Children's disability benefits specialists.
- Advocacy services for children.
- A front door to eligibility determination for CLTS programs including Katie Beckett and CCS.

Support Special Education

Problem

Wisconsin has under-funded special education for years and the pandemic has added to these challenges. Wisconsin only reimburses local costs up to 28% for special education, despite the last state budget that included the first increase for special education in over a decade.

Facts

- Over 120,000 students (14%) have disabilities.
- Students with disabilities lag significantly behind their peers in academics. Their proficiency rate on standardized tests is three times less than their peers without disabilities.
- The rate of suspension for students with disabilities is 1-in-4 each year, whereas this rate is about 1-in-16 for students without disabilities.

Talking Points

- Investing in students with disabilities improves their future success in the community and workforce.
- Youth with disabilities, who leave school unprepared for adult life, are more likely to live in poverty and rely on public benefits.
- The portion of special education funding that is not covered by federal or state budgets must come from local tax dollars, which puts great pressure on communities.
- Over the past decade, special education costs have increased by an estimated 18.3%.

Solution

Ask your legislator to increase special education funding to cover 40% of costs, to provide the quality education that students with disabilities need.

Support Children's Mental Health

Problem

Wisconsin falls far short of recommended school staffing for services like school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses who help students with mental health needs. Students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities have the highest suspension rate and the second-lowest graduation rate of any disability group, which could be improved by increased access to school-based mental health services.

Facts

- Almost 60% of students in 9th- 12th grades experienced depression, anxiety, self-harm or suicidal thoughts in 2019. The pandemic has increased these numbers.
- 15% of children ages 12–17 have had an episode of major depression in the last year.
- Students dealing with mental-health issues miss more days of school than their peers.

Talking Points

- Tell your legislator that increased access to school-based social workers, counselors, psychologists, and nurses would help children and their schools.

Solution

Ask your legislator to support an increase in funding for education staffing to pay for additional school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and social workers.

Support Family Caregivers

Problem

Families take on many roles as they care for their children with complex needs. As workforce shortages impact all parts of our economy, families are doing things like providing medical care coordination, direct care, special education, and therapies. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the strain on family caregivers who have been forced to leave their jobs or put their own health at risk to continue providing care. Many family caregivers leave their jobs or must cut work hours because there are no other options for help. Constant stress is damaging the physical and mental health of the entire family.

Facts

- 85% of families do not have enough direct care workers to provide services needed for their child.
- Families fill in the gaps, working long hours, every day doing complex personal and medical care.
- Even before the pandemic, 1 in 4 families had to cut back or stop working to care for their children. It is much worse now.
- In 2020, the average wage for Wisconsin direct care workers was \$13.22 per hour.

Talking Points

- Wisconsin children with disabilities wait every day for services they need because there are no workers.
- Family caregivers fill in the gaps doing things like providing care coordination, transportation, direct care, employment support, education, and day service supports.
- Many family caregivers leave their jobs or must cut back on their work hours.
- Families need breaks. A lack of paid workers is making it impossible for families to take a break.
- Constant stress is damaging the physical and mental health of all family members.

Solution

- **Create a family caregiver tax credit.**
- **Expand who can use Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) to include grandparents, grandchildren, and siblings.**
- **Make sure all families can get help at a Disability Resource Center for Children and Families.**
- **Address the current workforce shortage.**
 - **Provide emergency funding for community-based supports to keep people in their homes.**
 - **Allow low-wage caregivers to work and earn more pay without losing health care or childcare benefits.**
 - **Direct the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to include the community-based direct care workforce in its Fast Forward grants.**