



WISCONSIN'S COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATE

by Tracy Miller
Independent Living Specialist

Have you had your vaccination yet?

Millions of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Wisconsin, and the percentage of people who have been fully vaccinated, or have received at least one dose, is steadily increasing. Progress is being made in fighting the virus and protecting Wisconsin's citizens.

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THE PATH FORWARD



CORONAVIRUS UPDATES



LIMITED IN-PERSON SERVICES AVAILABLE

by Jason Beloungy
Executive Director

As of April 5th, Access to Independence is again able to provide in-person services, as needed. While this is good news to staff, and to the people we serve, we want to be clear that we are not yet back to a pre-pandemic service model. If services can continue to be provided virtually, that will be the preferred method.

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Peer support has been shown to help people in so many ways to increase mental and physical wellness and improve lives.

IMPROVE WELLNESS

Peer Mentor Support Update

by **Tracy Miller**

Independent Living Specialist

We want to extend a big Thank You to all the people who have volunteered to be peer mentors! The value of peer support has become more evident over the past year, when many people have experienced anxiety and depression brought on, or made worse, by the isolation and uncertainty of the pandemic. Peer support has been shown to help people in so many ways to increase mental and physical wellness and improve lives. We

are especially grateful to the volunteers who help us support our peers in this way.

Please let us know if you are a person with a disability who might be interested in joining our volunteers in helping people maintain human connection and work on personal goals. Also, if you are in need of support, let us know. We may be able to match you with someone to provide support by phone, email, or virtually (for the time being - we hope that, soon, in-person support will also be possible.)

Speaking of peer support, would you be interested in joining other people with disabilities for virtual discussion and mutual learning? We are planning some opportunities this spring and summer for you to network with other people with disabilities virtually to discuss different topics related to the disability experience. Let us know if this kind of networking is something that would interest you!

Call Tracy at 608-716-7101 or email tracym@accesstoind.org to let us know if you might like to participate in a virtual discussion group.

BUDGET REQUESTS

State of Wisconsin Budget Update

by **Jason Beloungy**

Executive Director

The State of Wisconsin's budget covers a 2-year period from July 1 of an odd-numbered year through June 30 of the next odd-numbered year. Development of the biennial budget involves a nearly year-long process. In the fall of the even-numbered year, state agencies submit budget requests to the Department of Administration. Requests are compiled by the State Budget Office for review by the Governor. The Governor is required by law to deliver the budget message to the new legislature. To meet the state's budgetary cycle, the budget should be signed and effective by July 1 of the odd-numbered year. If there is a delay, state agencies operate at their appropriation authority from the prior budget until the new budget is in effect.

That explanation, as provided by the State Department of Administration, helps explain why Wisconsin is currently in a budget process for the 2021-2023 biennial budget, which should begin July 1st of this year. As with every budget process, Access to Independence works with its statewide association, the Wisconsin Coalition of

Independent Living Centers (WCILC) to advocate for budget priorities that impact people with disabilities. As the budget works its way through the Joint Committee on Finance, here is a sample of some of the priorities we'll be advocating for:

Health Care

- Expand Medicaid under the federal Affordable Care Act by covering all low-income Wisconsin residents who earn incomes between 0 percent and 138 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Ensure that any child who is eligible and applies for the disabled Children's Long-Term Support waiver program receives services under the program.
- Build on the work of the Governor's Task Force on Caregiving by investing in our caregivers.

Mental Health

- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for outpatient mental health services, substance use disorder treatment, and child-adolescent day treatment psychiatric services to increase access to suicide treatment and prevention services.

- Provide funding for the Farmer Mental Health Assistance Program and create a Regional Farmer Mental Health Support Program to strengthen outreach and mental health services for Wisconsin's farm families.
- Provide funding for staff at peer-run respite centers run the warm line.

Transportation

- Increase general transit operating assistance by 2.5 percent in each year, strengthening a vital resource for those who would do not drive but ride within our communities. Programs that supplement public transit, like paratransit aids, tribal elderly transportation aids, and the specialized transit assistance program are also increased.
- Increase paratransit aids by 2.5 percent in each year of the biennium.
- Increase funding in the specialized transit assistance program in each year of the biennium.

If you'd like to stay up on state budget or other advocacy issues at a local, state or federal level, join our ActionNet advocacy list by visiting us online at accesstoind.org/actionnet.html, or by calling us at 608-242-8484.



HELP ACCESS REDUCE COSTS

By requesting your newsletter in email format, you can help ACCESS reduce printing costs while still receiving the same great information! Contact us today to change how you read **The Open Door**.



Pictured:
An electronic fishing reel makes one-handed fishing, effortless.

ADAPTIVE DEVICES

Adaptive Technology for Outdoor Fun!

by **Rebecca Patterson**

Independent Living Specialist

Whether you already have an outdoor hobby, or you're looking to start a new one, you may need some adaptive equipment to help you out. Here are some simple adaptive devices for outdoor fun:

Adaptive fishing gear: Do you want to spend a day fishing at the lake? We have equipment to help you cast the line, hold the rod, and reel in your catch. Everyone will be jealous of the fish you bring in!

Gardening tools: Whether you like growing flowers or fresh veggies, there are tools to help! Some tools have long handles so you don't need to bend over. Or, some tools come with various kinds of handles that will help with your grip.

And much more: If you're interested in other hobbies like biking, camping, water sports, golfing, or any number of other activities, chances are there is adaptive equipment that can help. We have adaptive equipment available for free demonstration or loan. If we don't have exactly what you're looking for, our staff members can help you find the resources to get what you want. Let us help you enjoy the activities that interest you! Contact us to learn more.

UPDATE

FROM PAGE 1

But we're not out of the woods yet! CDC guidance, in addition to getting vaccinated, still includes wearing a mask in public, maintaining social distance, and washing your hands often, as well as other guidelines to prevent further spread of the virus.

We encourage people with disabilities and their caregivers to get vaccinated as soon as they can. People in long term care programs, along with their paid and unpaid caregivers, are among priority groups currently receiving the vaccine. Individuals age 16 and older with certain medical conditions that have a greater risk of severe infection from COVID-19 are also eligible to receive the vaccine. Transportation to vaccination sites is available, and people with disabilities who can't leave their homes also have options to get the vaccine.

The state now has a phone number to call for more information, and to register to receive the vaccine: 844-684-1064. Assistance is also available in Spanish and Hmong, as well as other languages, at this number.

We have compiled information resources for residents of our 4-county service area on vaccination options. Our Independent Living Services staff can help answer your questions about the vaccine, and direct you to vaccine sites and available transportation options. Feel free to call us or email us at info@accesstoind.org if we can help! STOP the spread of COVID-19!

Contact ACCESS for a compiled list of resources for residents of our service area on vaccination and transportation options to help you access the vaccine.

SERVICES

FROM PAGE 1



PREPARATION GUIDANCE

Access to Independence has taken several steps to ensure a safe environment for staff members, and the public. Using guidance from public health officials, Access has instituted cleaning protocols, signage, capacity limits, and made personal protective equipment readily available, as well as a mask requirement.



SAFETY GUIDELINES

Access to Independence has set guidelines for staff members, and those we serve, that must be followed before any in-person services are provided. This includes:

- ➔ Any employee who is sick, who has been exposed to someone who is/may be positive for COVID-19, or believes they may have an illness, must NOT come to the office, or go out to a consumer's home, or community location.
- ➔ In advance of any in-person meeting at the office, or in the community, staff members will ask the consumer/visitor, or anyone attending with them, if they are sick, or have been in contact with anyone with COVID-19 – if yes, the staff member will cancel/reschedule the appointment, or provide virtual options.
- ➔ In advance of any in-person meeting at the office or in the community, the staff person will ask if the consumer/visitor, and anyone attending with them, is able to wear a mask and can maintain social distancing during the appointment – if no, staff members will request an alternative location, or a virtual appointment.



SERVICE PREPARATIONS

- ➔ All office appointments will be greeted outside by the staff member who scheduled the appointment. Visitors will use the doorbell at the front door when they arrive.
- ➔ The office will only be available by appointment only – no drop-in visits will be allowed. This is done to ensure capacity limits are not exceeded.
- ➔ Office appointments will not be held in staff offices, but will instead take place in the conference room, or in an AT room, if social distancing can be achieved.

Access to Independence will continue to monitor local health metrics when determining if guidelines can be relaxed, or if necessary, tightened. If you are currently working with someone, please contact them for more information about appointment options. If you would like to inquire about services, our contact information is on the back page of this newsletter. We're looking forward to seeing people in-person again, and hope you are staying well.

2021 ARTISTS BEYOND BOUNDARIES

CALLING ALL ARTISTS WITH DISABILITIES LIVING ACROSS WISCONSIN!
ACCESS TO INDEPENDENCE WILL BE HOSTING OUR 4TH ANNUAL
ARTISTS BEYOND BOUNDARIES FUNDRAISING EVENT!

What is Artists Beyond Boundaries?

Artists Beyond Boundaries is an art event celebrating the talents of artists with disabilities living across the state of Wisconsin. This year's fundraising event will be completely virtual!

How does it work?

- 1 From June 1st to August 31st, 2021 artists with disabilities of all skill levels are invited to submit up to two works of their art for a chance to win one of thirteen cash prizes. Because this year's event is virtual, we will be asking artists to submit one high quality JPEG image of each piece they wish to submit.
- 2 Beginning in September, ACCESS will work with jurors from various visual arts organizations to determine which 12 works of art will be selected to win \$200. These works of art will also be featured in our 2022 Artists Beyond Boundaries calendar!
- 3 On October 7th, we will host a FREE live-stream gala featuring ALL of the artwork submitted to the event as well as announce this year's top twelve works of art. This live stream event also serves as a fundraiser for our agency, and attendees will have the opportunities to make donations throughout the night. All money raised will go towards the programs and services that we provide to the people we serve!
- 4 Following the live event, we will ask viewers to choose the thirteenth and final winner by voting for the People's Choice Award. All artworks submitted by artists who have not already received an award, are eligible for this prize. The People's Choice Award winner will have their artwork featured on the Artists Beyond Boundaries calendar cover. The People's Choice Award winner will also receive \$200.

Learn more

Learn more about this event by visiting artistsbeyondboundaries.weebly.com.
You can also follow us on Facebook for important updates and information @Access.to.Independence.WI.



WisLoan and TeleWork Loan Programs

Funding Independence

Wisloan and Telework are alternative loan programs that assist Wisconsin residents with disabilities to enable people to become self-employed or to work from home. These loan programs are different than traditional bank loans because a bank doesn't make the final decision, the WisLoan and Telework Board does. That allows flexibility for people who have an item they need to maintain their independence but have trouble coming up with the money all at once, or finding other ways to pay for what they need. Simply call Access to Independence for information (608) 242-8484.

WisLoan

What Can I Buy with a WisLoan?

You can purchase technology such as wheelchairs, computers, ramps, vehicle modifications, or home modifications.

TeleWork

What Can I Buy with a TeleWork Loan?

You can purchase items such as computers and software, scanners or fax machines, tools, office furniture, or modifications for an accessible office.

General Questions

How much can I borrow?

Loan amount range from \$250 to \$50,000. The loan would be for the exact amount of the item.

Can I apply if I have no job?

Yes. Social Security Disability or Retirement benefits and other sources of income are considered.

Can I apply if my credit is poor?

Yes. The reason for the poor credit is considered, as is one's ability to repay the loan.

How do I apply?

Contact ACCESS to complete the loan application materials in person. Application can be done at the ACCESS office or at a location of your preference.

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Access to Independence greatly appreciates the generosity of all those who have made a financial contribution – big or small – to our organization. Through the generosity of our donors, ACCESS is able to expand opportunities for individuals with disabilities to access demonstrations and free loans of assistive technology equipment, skills training in peoples' homes and classes at our office in Madison, among the wide array of services we provide. We would like to thank each of our sponsors for their generosity!

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