



State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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Telephone: 608-266-9354
Website: [dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd)

Monday, February 21, 2022

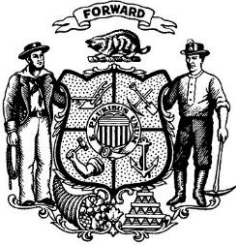
The Honorable Tony Evers
115 E. Capitol Dr. # 1
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers,

Attached please find the 2021 Annual Report of the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD).

As the Annual Report demonstrates, much of GCPD's attention in 2021 continued to be focused on COVID, most specifically on how many people with disabilities experienced significant challenges accessing health care. Through public testimony, the GCPD became aware that some health care providers would not allow people with disabilities to have a caregiver/support person accompany them to medical appointments. On February 1, 2021, the GCPD released a survey to see if this was a widespread concern. GCPD received 437 survey responses from people with disabilities, caregivers, and advocates for people with disabilities from across Wisconsin. Of the 140 people with disabilities that responded to the survey, 47 percent indicated that they were not allowed to bring their caregiver/support person with them. Many reported that lack of a caregiver being present negatively impacted their health care experience in some way. An [Executive Summary](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd/gcpd-covid19-survey-summary.pdf) of the full survey findings is available on GCPD's website (<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd/gcpd-covid19-survey-summary.pdf>).

GCPD distributed information about the survey and its findings to a variety of stakeholders including health care provider associations and advocacy groups. GCPD also began work on an informational video that will serve as a tool to educate and inform those stakeholders and the public about the unique needs of people with disabilities; including the importance of having support people/caregivers accompany people with disabilities to medical appointments and the need for reasonable accommodations to be provided to ensure access to health care services.



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While COVID has garnered much of the GCPD's attention, there are a number of other important issues the GCPD is focusing on, such as employment, transportation and opportunities and access for people with disabilities. These are outlined in GCPD's Work Plan developed in 2022 and that will guide the Committee's work over the next three years.

Members of the GCPD are proud of the visibility this important Committee brings to people with disabilities. GCPD is grateful for the ongoing staff support provided by the Department of Health Services and the Committee is especially grateful to you and to the Lieutenant Governor for your continued support of people with disabilities.

GCPD looks forward to another year of robust activity in 2022.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margaret Kristan".

Margaret Kristan, Chair
Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

CC: GCPD Members and Lt. Governor Mandela Barnes



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Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) Annual Report 2021

The GCPD is dedicated to enhancing the health and well-being of Wisconsin citizens who have disabilities. As a Committee of Governor-appointed volunteers with cross-disability council representation (Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, Council on Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Council on Physical Disabilities, Statutory Council on Blindness), GCPD serves to advise the Governor, state agencies, and the state legislature on issues of concern for people who have disabilities.

This report serves as an overview of activity and accomplishments of GCPD during the 2021 calendar year.

GCPD has been appreciative of the collaboration and partnership with the Governor's and Lieutenant Governor's offices over the past year.

Structure and Function

- The need for the GCPD to address the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the attention generally given to the Committee's established subcommittees. In addition, the general disconnect between the goals stated in GCPD's three-year Work Plan and its subcommittee structure was identified as an area in need of more practical alignment. This was addressed in GCPD's new three-year Work Plan.
- The full Committee Bi-Monthly meeting schedule established in 2020 was continued through 2021. The Executive Committee continued to meet on a weekly basis. It was agreed that the volume of work and the very fluid environment of policy issues demanded this more aggressive meeting approach.
- All meetings of the GCPD were held virtually and GCPD is grateful for the assistance of the Department of Health Services support staff for their assistance with hosting these meetings for GCPD.

Activities

- Late in 2020, the Executive Committee of the Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) began receiving reports that some people with disabilities were told by some health care providers that they could not have a disability support person present during medical appointments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



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- In order to assess the extent to which this was occurring throughout the state, in January 2021, the GCPD drafted a survey, based on public comments received at GCPD meetings in 2020, to find out if people with disabilities had access to health care services and reasonable accommodations during the pandemic.
- The GCPD distributed the survey to its constituent disability councils and to a wide array of stakeholder organizations. From February 1, 2021, through March 1, 2021, GCPD collected survey responses to its *Right to Have a Support Person/Caregiver at Appointment Survey* from people with disabilities, caregivers, and disability advocates.
- On February 18, 2021, the GCPD sent a [letter](#) to members of the Senate, Assembly, and Joint Finance Committee on State Legislative Rules related to public testimony and lack of accessibility for people with disabilities.
- On February 20, 2021, GCPD finalized its [2020 Annual Report](#).
- In April 2021, GCPD created a [PowerPoint](#) and [Executive Summary](#) of the *Right to Have a Support Person at Appointments Survey* results.
- In May 2021, the Joint Finance Committee had acted to remove number of key items from the proposed budget, some of which would have a negative impact on people with disabilities. The issues covered a wide range including voter access, ABLE accounts, Medicaid expansion, broadband access, and many others. On May 26, 2021, GCPD sent a [letter](#) to Wisconsin Representatives and Senators in response to the State Fiscal Year 2021-2023 Biennial Budget.
- GCPD shared the *Right to Have a Support Person at Appointments Survey* results and Executive Summary to all states active in National Association of Governors Committees on People with Disabilities in May 2021. States that indicated they forwarded the information on to their networks included Kansas, Missouri, and New Jersey.
- In June 2021, *Right to Have a Support Person at Appointments Survey* design, implementation, results, and policy recommendation to 110 participants at the Aging and Disability Network forum.
- Also in June 2021, GCPD expressed deep concerns with actions taken by Wisconsin lawmakers relative to voting. The bills were, in the opinion of the



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GCPD, needlessly restrictive and would create an undue burden on thousands of Wisconsin citizens with disabilities. GCPD sent a [letter](#) to Governor Tony Evers raising concerns related to voting accessibility for people with disabilities.

- In June 2021, GCPD partners with the Council on Physical Disabilities (CPD) to create the [Emergency Preparedness Communications Folder](#). This folder was designed as a resource for health care providers and people with disabilities to address communication and access barriers in health care settings. In addition, GCPD and CPD drafted the [Know Your Rights](#) document which outlines federal and state laws that protect people's civil rights and prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the health care setting and steps on what to do if reasonable accommodation requests are denied.
- On August 11, 2021, GCPD sent a [GOV-D message](#) to the Department of Health Services Health Care Provider Network on Addressing Barriers to Health Care Services for People with Disabilities.
- On August 26, 2021, GCPD issued a [press release](#) on health care inequities faced by people with disabilities.
- In an effort to broaden GCPD's membership, GCPD sent a [GOV-D message](#) about current membership vacancies in September 2021.
- GCPD began work on a COVID-19 Educational Training Video to capture the experiences of people with disabilities accessing health care during the pandemic in October 2021.
- In October 2021, GCPD finalized its three year [work plan for 2022-2024](#). The plan addresses the key issues for people with disabilities including Transportation, Employment, and Opportunities and Access. The work plan outlines a subcommittee structure that would be aligned with these key areas in order to bring attention and accountability to the targeted areas. In addition to these three subcommittees, a fourth group has been formed to specifically address needed revisions to the existing GCPD by-laws.
- In December 2021, GCPD held officer elections and elected Margaret Kristan as Chair and Rhonda Staats as Vice-Chair. Ramsey Lee was also elected as an Executive Committee at-Large member.



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Membership

The members listed below served on GCPD during calendar year 2021.

Member's Name	Member's Role
David Morstad	Chair, Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Margaret Kristan	Vice-Chair, Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Nancy Leipzig	Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Pearl Fessenden	Member-at-Large, Executive Committee Member
Ben Barrett	Executive Committee Member, Representative from the Wisconsin Council on Physical Disabilities (with a disability)
Evelyn Azbell	Member-at-Large
Julie Blasky	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Gail Bovy	Representative from the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities
Kimberlee Coronado	Representative from the Wisconsin Council on Mental Health
John Hartman	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Dan Idzikowski	Member-at-Large
Daniel Laatsch	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Ramsey Lee	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Fred Ludwig	Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes, Ex-Officio Member
Tom O'Connor	Representative from the Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (with a disability)
John Olson	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Sandy Popp	Member-at-Large (with a disability)
Maureen Ryan	Member-at-Large
Rhonda Staats	Representative from the Statutory Council on Blindness (with a disability)
Vacant	Member-at-Large
Stacy Stone	Representative from the State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

- As a result of elections held in late 2020, the Executive Committee consisted of a majority (3/5) of people with disabilities.
- The GCPD made a concerted effort to fill vacant positions throughout the year. This included both at-large positions and two Council liaison roles that had proven to be less active than needed. By the end of the year, the Council positions appear to have stabilized and attendance and participation has improved.



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- The vacancies in the at-large positions proves to be challenging due to a unique situation within GCPD's own by-laws. The by-laws state that a majority of the members must be people with disabilities; in fact, one statement requires that 66% have disabilities. At the same time, appointments to the GCPD have no term limits. This makes achieving the required level of membership by people with disabilities practically impossible. GCPD establish a by- laws subcommittee to examine this and other issues and make recommendations to the full GCPD in 2022.
- In addition, GCPD recognizes the need to have a more diverse membership that better reflects the ethnic and cultural composition of the State's population and is exploring strategies to attract people of color and diverse ethnic backgrounds to be appointed to GCPD. GCPD also recognizes the need to recruit and attract younger people with disabilities to be appointed to GCPD.