



State of Wisconsin

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

1 WEST WILSON STREET,
ROOM 551
POST OFFICE BOX 2659
MADISON, WI 53701-2659
Telephone: 608-266-9354
Website: gcpd.wisconsin.gov

Issue: Telehealth and Broadband Access

Broadband connectivity is quickly becoming one of the most basic of human needs. Broadband connectivity provides: communication with others; opportunity to grow through education and employment; and connection to essential information and services. Broadband is widely available across the United States. However, there continues to be pockets of unserved areas and this is especially true in rural areas of Wisconsin. Although programs exist to assist with the cost of internet service and technology devices these programs are not beneficial if broadband access is not available.

The need for broadband access has become even more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Broadband access is needed for remote work, school work, to access unemployment benefits, to enter bank information for stimulus checks, for telehealth visits, and to connect with others during times of social isolation. Also the internet has been a vital resource in providing information about COVID-19 as well as information on safety precautions to prevent community spread of the virus. Without connectivity there are pockets of people with disabilities who may not have access to this information through other means. In addition, this means there are people with disabilities who do not have access to vital telehealth services.

Recommendations:

- GCPD recommends the state invest in broadband infrastructure and cell phone towers in Wisconsin needs to occur to enable people with disabilities to live independently.
- GCPD also recommends the state provides funding for devices and hotspots to people with disabilities. GCPD recommends using Illinois as a project model where their ATP received \$1.7 million CARES Act funding and leveraged an additional \$250,000 because the response rate had exceeded the funding available. They created the Illinois Cares Connection Project offering two bundles (iPad and Android). Participants who do not have internet are offered a year of service. They also have a data system to track activity from referral to fulfillment, tutorial for both bundles, provide telephone technical assistance, and more.