



Access Info



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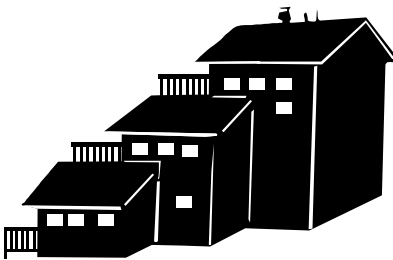
April 2011

State Budget Battle 2011: What does it mean for people with disabilities in Wisconsin?

Looking out our window to the west, you can see the dome of the State Capitol. That constant reminder of our state government has kept the office abuzz with opinions, concerns and healthy discussion about the state Budget Repair Bill and the 2011-2013 State Budget. While most of the media's attention around both budget bills has been focused on the unions and collective bargaining, Access to Independence has been working to tell folks about the Medical Assistance (MA) provisions.

In the Budget Repair Bill, which passed the State Senate under a controversial procedure, and then passed in the State Assembly before being signed into law, contains no talk of cuts to services. Instead, the new law requires the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) to study changes to the state plan, and the state's MA waivers, to improve efficiencies and cost-effectiveness, as well as improving the health status of people who are in the Medicaid program, and the sustainability of Medicaid. Based on those studies, DHS could make determinations on how to make improvements. It would have the authority to do an array of actions, including: adding or increasing cost-sharing; changing or reducing benefits under the program, or offering different benefits to different groups of people; mandate managed care; change the way providers are reimbursed; reduce income levels for eligibility; and eliminate presumptive eligibility – amongst other actions. What this means is that DHS would have authority to make sweeping changes to the Medicaid program in Wisconsin, with minimal oversight needed from the State Legislature – if the changes are first approved by the Federal Government agency called the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). If they do not grant approval to the proposed changes, they cannot be implemented. If CMS gives approval, DHS would only need approval from the State Legislature if the new rule conflicts with current state law. Answering the concerns about needing the process to be transparent, DHS has vowed to seek stakeholder input for all proposed changes.

Article continued on Page 2, "Budget Battle 2011"



Upcoming Workshop Available at ATI: YOUR HOUSING! *Rights and Resources*



April is Fair Housing Month. Do you know your housing rights? Do you know where and how to find housing that meets your needs? Join Access to Independence and the Fair Housing Center of Greater Madison to learn more at this FREE workshop.

Where: Access to Independence office.

When: Tuesday, April 12, 2 to 4 p.m.

To RSVP, and/or if you need materials in alternative formats, a sign language interpreter, or any other accommodations to participate in this training, please contact Claire Draeger by calling the ATI office at 608-242-8484 or by e-mail at claired@accessstoind.org. RSVP by Friday, April 8th

Budget Battle 2011 (Continued from Page 1)

Another important point to discuss is that new law makes an effort to give DHS the authority to get waivers from the federal government that would allow WI to be more restrictive with its MA eligibility for non-disabled adults who are not pregnant, than what the new federal healthcare law permits. If DHS cannot get this waiver, they would reduce MA eligibility from 200% (the current level) to 133% of the Federal Poverty Level – making it harder to be eligible for Medicaid. This would also have the potential to affect eligibility to programs like BadgerCare, Family Care and the Medicaid Purchase Plan, among others.

Finally, this law is not permanent. The language that was passed states that the authority granted to

DHS, and any subsequent rules they would make, would end on January 1st, 2015. This could change if the State Legislature decided to continue the provisions or new rules past that date.

Now that these proposals are law, it is imperative to all of us on Medicaid, or concerned with Medicaid's future, to keep up on proposed changes by DHS. DHS will need to know how any proposed changes would impact people who rely on those benefits for survival. It's not easy keeping up on these changes. That is one of the reasons why ATI has been working to get people involved with our grassroots advocacy network of groups called "ActionNet". To learn more about ActionNet, go to page 5. You can also read more on our website.

2011-2013 Budget: While we have been keeping a focus on the state Budget Repair Bill,

the Governor released his 2011-2013 biennial budget. This budget contains a number of proposals that impact people with disabilities, including: Family Care, Family Care Partnership, PACE and IRIS enrollment caps in counties where these programs are available. The bill also prohibits the expansion of these programs into counties where not available on July 1st of this year. The bill does continue with the proposed expansion of Aging and Disability Resource Centers in the state, and maintains the Family Care Ombudsman program at current levels. Many of the Medicaid changes discussed in this article carry over into this budget, as DHS has authority to make changes, and no specifics are proposed at this time. For more details on the budget bill, you can go to: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/AB40.pdf>.

NEW STAFF AT ATI

David Johansen has joined ATI as a new Independent Living Specialist. David's previous work experience includes extensive work as a social worker with children and families, mostly in the field of adoption. David met his wife, a native from Colorado, while attending UW-Madison. They lived in Chicago for five years, but returned in 2001 to raise their daughters, ages 12 and 8. David is himself a native of Minnesota, but considers himself a full-fledged Wisconsinite!

Nick Zouski is a new Independent Living Specialist at ATI. Nick has been living in Madison since 2000 and has been involved in community issues, working with other organizations for several years. Nick grew up in central Wisconsin and has a passion for all things Wisconsin! Nick looks forward to bringing his personal experience with independent living to Access to Independence!

Access to Independence welcomes our new staff and hopes you'll get a chance to meet them!

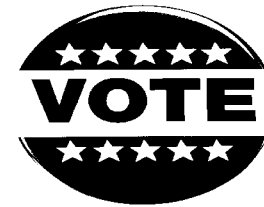
SPRING ELECTIONS HAPPEN ON APRIL 5th!

With all that is happening in state government, many people have forgotten that we have a Spring Election happening on Tuesday, April 5th. The Spring Election will have a ballot with one statewide race—the Wisconsin State Supreme Court. This race is between the incumbent, David Prosser and Assistant Attorney General JoAnn Kloppenburg. The State Supreme Court is an important race as the court hears appeals from state courts and take up new legal challenges.

Also on the ballot are a number of local races for county executives and county board members; mayors and city council members; school board members and other local elected officials. This year, more than ever before, the importance of these elected positions is very high. The reason is that the Governor is reducing budgets, capping tax increases and giving flexibility to local governments to cut programs and services. Be sure to find out who's on the ballot and see where they

stand on the programs and services in your community and county, and how will they respond to the reductions in their state aid.

People with disabilities continue to vote in low numbers. Do your part by registering AND voting, as well as assisting others with doing the same. We as a community will not be heard unless we as community vote more often!

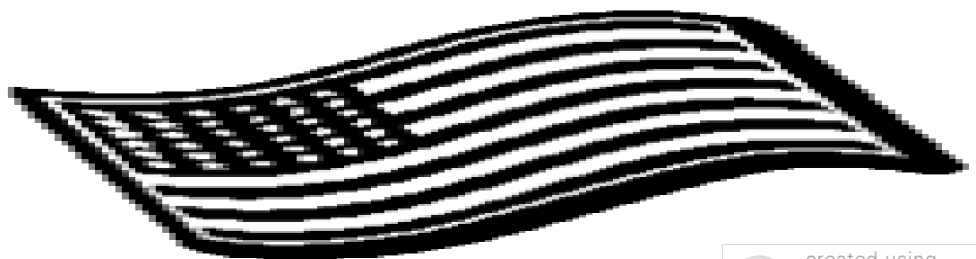


HEY VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES!

Access to Independence is proud to serve those who have served their country. In effort to improve our ability to reach veterans, and provide veterans with services in conjunction or separate from the VA, we have on our staff a Veterans Outreach Worker, Richard Harris. Richard, himself a veteran from the first Gulf War, can assist veterans with disabilities in a number of ways. Richard has a lot of knowledge and access to resources to assist veterans who may not know what programs and services are available to them, both inside and outside of the VA

system. Richard can also assist veterans with disabilities as they attempt to navigate the complex Veterans Administration, even providing individual advocacy with veterans as they need it. Richard is available to work with veterans when they aren't sure what it is they need. Richard can provide an independent living assessment, or an assistive

technology assessment. Finally, Richard works at a systems level to communicate the needs of veterans with disabilities with agencies within the VA, and other service agencies. If you would like to speak to Richard, please contact him at 1-800-362-9877, ext. 234. Richard can also be reached by e-mail at richardh@accesstoind.org



ATI is Building Toward the Future!!

ATI has been busy growing the last couple of years. We have added a number of staff, doubling the number of people providing the quality services you should expect from us. While it is true that we have only been at our current location for a few years, the burst of growth has left us out of room to operate effectively or grow—which is what we are planning to do.

To meet the needs of our new and expanding services, ATI

is in the process of securing a new home. To make this plan a reality, ATI has developed a capital campaign called “Building Toward the Future”. This campaign will help ATI raise the money needed to move to a new location, and to update the new location to meet the diverse needs of our agency and our consumers.

We recognize that times are tough, and for many, things aren’t getting any better. That said, we hope you can

provide even a small donation to assist our move.

You can do a secure donation through your PayPal account, online, by going to our website (www.acesstoind.org), and click on the “Donate” tab at the top.

You can also send a check to:
Access to Independence
c/o Geri Girard
301 S. Livingston Ste 200
Madison, WI 53703
Write “Capital Campaign” on the subject line of the check.

WisLoan and TeleWork Loan Programs

Funding Independence!

WisLoan and TeleWork are alternative loan programs that assist Wisconsin residents with disabilities to pay for assistive technology, or to purchase the necessary equipment and technology to enable people 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 may have an item they need to maintain their independence, but have trouble coming up the money all at once, or finding other ways to pay for what they need. Simply call Access to Independence for information.

WisLoan

What Can I Buy with a WisLoan? You can purchase technology such as wheelchairs, computers, ramps, vehicle modifications, or kitchen or bathroom remodeling projects or construction.

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 amounts range from \$5,000 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 ATI to complete the loan application materials in person. Application can be done at the ATI office or at a location of your preference.

ActionNet: Be Educated—Be Empowered!

There is a lot going on in state politics and the state budget process right now. How much do you know about the impact of the proposals on people with disabilities? When local communities and county governments start having to make tough choices about programs and services to cut, how are you going to know what those cuts are, what they mean to people with disabilities, and how to act? ActionNet is that way. ActionNet has developed three local groups in Dane, Dodge and Green counties, and is working on development in Columbia County. These groups have

been busy learning about the issues, learning about what it takes to build a grassroots effort, and identifying other local issues to organize around. ActionNet gives the communities a voice and an opportunity to work towards real change. Currently local groups are meeting on a regular basis with Green County meeting the 1st Thursday of every month, Dodge county meeting the 2nd Tuesday of every month, and Dane County meeting the 2nd Friday of every month. If you'd like to help plan the first Columbia County meetings, let us know! ActionNet always welcomes new members, so

feel free to join us as we begin addressing local issues in your community, and keep up with all that is happening in Madison and Washington DC. One of the benefits of being a part of ActionNet is that it offers unique opportunities for people concerned with disability issues to come together to voice their concerns. Since this is a grassroots program, it starts with YOU! If you are interested in joining, showing support to others in your community, or volunteering, please contact Jason Glozier today by calling 1-800-362-9877, ext. 236. You can e-mail Jason at jasong@accesstoind.org.

No One Deserves to Be Without a Telephone!

Grants are available for people with physical disabilities that limit their usage of a telephone. Access to Independence (ATI) can provide a \$100 grant for telephone equipment.

Who is Eligible?

- A Wisconsin resident living in Dane, Columbia, Dodge, and Green County with a physical disability or conditions
- Household income at or below 200% of poverty level
- People requiring specialized telephones and equipment



How Can Access to Independence, Inc Help...

- Provide eligible individuals with physical disabilities a one time grant of \$100
- Assist with application process
- Demonstration and selection of equipment

If you are interested in learning more about TEPP, or the co-pay voucher, please call ATI today and ask to speak with an Independent Living Specialist.

*Program funded by the Universal Service Program of the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

ATI Just Keeps Getting Better!

Access to Independence has been working to meet the needs of the communities we serve for over THIRTY YEARS. We hope through the articles in this edition of Access Info that you can see how busy we've been, and much of what we have been doing. With all that is going on, we thought it would be a good idea to take a moment and reflect on a couple of ways we are expanding services to meet the needs of our communities.

Benefits Counseling: ATI has always been able to assist individuals with disabilities through the maze of public benefits programs. With the addition of a Disability Benefits Specialist, we can also begin to provide work incentives benefits counseling, as well as having an in-house resource for the really technical issues that arise.

Assistive Technology and Accessibility: ATI continues to offer AT services such as demo's, loans, try-outs, location and funding services. We have been busy providing training to staff for RESNA certification that will increase our in-house knowledge and expertise in these areas. Whether for home, employment, or local businesses, these services are available throughout our region.

Peer Power: Own Your FUTURE!

JOIN TODAY!!!

Peer Power is a unique peer-based program designed to educate and empower high school students with disabilities to plan for their lives after high school. Participants of Peer Power learn how to actively take part in planning their future through learning about jobs, college, social and recreational opportunities and life after high school. If you would like to learn more about or join Peer Power Please call Kirsten Engel, toll-free at 1-800-362-9877, ext. 228. Kirsten can also be reached by e-mail at kirstene@accesstoind.org.



Peer Power is Now Recruiting Peer Mentors

The Peer Power program is recruiting young adults, who have left high school within the last few years, to become peer mentors. Peer Mentors help by providing support to the youth in Peer Power through sharing their life experiences and serving as role models.

If you are a young adult who has a few hours a month to share, some awesome high

school students could use your help! If interested, call Kirsten Engel, toll-free at 1-800-362-9877, ext. 228. Kirsten can also be reached by e-mail at kirstene@accesstoind.org.

There are a lot of exciting activities planned for this summer, so call and learn more to own your future!

Beyond Dane: A Look at Our *Other* Counties

ATI has seen a lot of staff changes since the beginning of the year. With the departures, medical leaves, and position changes, we have not spent as much time in Columbia, Dodge and Green Counties as we expect. We have been aggressively filling vacant positions, and are happy to report that we will be fully staffed by April. Once we are fully staffed, we will resume the office hours, outreach activities and frequent visits by a staff person dedicated to those counties. Tracy Miller will continue to provide services and outreach to Columbia County. With Nick

Isham becoming our new Benefits Specialist, we have new staff coming in to be the dedicated staff for Dodge County and for Green County. We appreciate the patience of individuals living in those counties, and will continue to hold scheduled office hours at the Columbia County ADRC, the Dodge County Administration Building, and the Green County ADRC. Once those office hours resume, we will post on our webpage, www.accesstoind.org. If you do not have access to the internet, you can still call us and find out when someone

will be in your county. We do want to stress that although we are working to get dedicated staff back in all three outlying counties, we continue to provide all of our services in all four of our counties through existing staff. Just call and ask for an Independent Living Specialist, and we can work to meet your needs—in your county.

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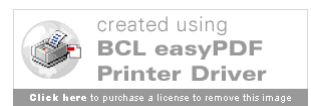
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**Not sure who to talk to?
 Just ask to speak to the
 person on call, and you
 will be able to speak to
 an Independent Living
 Specialist.**



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