

WI Disability and Aging Statement on Federal Proposals to Cut U.S. Health and Human Services and Dismantle Administration on Community Living

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Yesterday's [announcement](#) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will pose significant challenges for state governments and state budgets. The abrupt restructuring eliminating the Administration for Community Living (ACL) will likely disrupt critical services that maintain and improve the health of our most vulnerable citizens – including older Americans and people with disabilities.

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD), The Board on Aging and Long Term Care (BOALTC) , Disability Rights Wisconsin, The Waisman Center University Center for Excellence, The Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR), and the Centers for Independent Living in Wisconsin all receive funding from the Administration on Community Living and work closely together to:

- Test state and federal policies, to improve systems so older adults and people with disabilities are more independent, self-sufficient, and ensure the efficient use and return on investment of public programs.
- Monitor and ensure quality health care and long-term care programs for people with disabilities and aging adults, guaranteeing rights to live and age with dignity and the healthiest of options and supports.
- Protect the civil and human rights of our aging and disability populations, safeguarding against and responding to allegations of abuse and neglect.
- Support unpaid caregivers so they, too, can live a balanced life.
- Improve employment, food security, housing, and transportation to increase safety and independence, minimizing premature institutionalization or a worsening of disability.

The announcement on Thursday to eliminate the Administration for Community Living (ACL) was made without any input from Congress or people with disabilities, aging adults, and their families who are most impacted, and who rely on these programs daily for their health, safety and well-being.

In Wisconsin:

- 8 centers for Independent Living around the state provide essential services that empower people with disabilities to lead independent lives.
- Ombudsman programs for adults with disabilities and older adults ensure quality community supports are in place to provide the right type and right amount of quality care and service, while reducing the potential for abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- BPDD tests state and federal policies and prompts systems change that improves efficiency and outcomes for people with disabilities and their families. This results in less

reliance on public benefits while equipping thousands of people with disabilities and their families with important skills that reduce abuse and neglect so they can live safer, more healthy lives.

- Three Area Agencies on Aging, along with Wisconsin counties and tribes, administer critical nutrition services and other supports addressing social isolation, health-related outcomes, respite, and caregiving, all of which keep older adults independent and safe in their homes and communities, avoiding costly nursing facility admissions.
- The state's designated protection and advocacy organization for children and adults with disabilities, Disability Rights Wisconsin, monitors public and private institutions and programs, guards against abuse and neglect; protects individual legal rights; provides education and support in self-advocacy; and ensures access and accountability in the systems that serve people with disabilities.

Collectively, these partner agencies guarantee improved public programs that keep vulnerable Wisconsinites living healthy, safe lives in their communities instead of relying on costly institutions.

In 1970 President Richard Nixon authorized the Nursing Home Ombudsman Demonstration Program, the precursor to today's Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. The intent was to respond to the egregious and often life-threatening complaints about nursing home care. Some of those same complaints are present in long-term care settings today that serve older and disabled adults. ACL has been an informed and necessary leader and partner to help effect life-saving and person-centered change in how society views both healthy aging processes as well as long-term care programs.

ACL was established to consolidate several existing programs to more effectively implement long-standing laws, including the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, and the *Older Americans Act*. ACL has brought focus and alignment to disability and aging policy, and has ensured services are delivered in a way that supports independence and avoids costly institutional care. ACL has been an effective solution to more efficiently run these vital programs. Eliminating the Administration risks efficiency, effectiveness and the health and well-being of some of our country's most vulnerable citizens.

Older adults and people with disabilities need the strong commitment of the federal government to the existing infrastructure of federally charged organizations working on their behalf. Thursday's announcement is a step backward to supporting the critical work our collective organizations do in states, and life-saving work directly impacting older adults and people with disabilities.