

**Milwaukee County Family Care Expansion Challenges and Proposed Principles:  
A Perspective from Disability Advocates – May 20, 2008**

As disability advocates, we applaud Milwaukee County's commitment to expanding Family Care to younger people with disabilities and ending waiting lists. We are currently the only Family Care county in the state which limits Family Care services to people 60 and over. Milwaukee County is also without a Disability Benefit Specialist Program at this time, further restricting access to essential income, services, and insurance. By expanding Family Care to persons with disabilities aged 18 – 59, Milwaukee County will serve approximately 2500 current MA Waiver clients (COP and CIP) and 2500 now on the Milwaukee County Disabilities Services Division wait list, as well as adding a Disability Benefits Specialist Program which will increase access to benefits and leverage additional federal funding, helping many more Milwaukee County residents.

Expansion of Family Care in Milwaukee will include many challenges and opportunities:

**Adapting the current Milwaukee County Family Care model to the needs and values of younger people with disabilities, including greater emphasis on Self-Determination, consumer choice, and employment.**

Younger people who will be served by Family Care have different needs and interests than frail elderly:

- Transition services are needed for young people as they complete their schooling.
- Housing opportunities that support smaller integrated settings rather than large group homes and congregate living settings.
- Options for meaningful work in the community including supported employment.
- Support for moving out of institutions into the community.
- Implementation of Self-Directed Supports for people with disabilities currently provides consumers with the authority to direct how the funding available to support them is allocated; this should continue in Family Care, however, it is a different model than that used by Aging in Family Care.
- Respecting the dignity of risk and ensuring a system based on self-determination that provides people with the support to make informed decisions and manage their actions to the greatest extent possible.

**Ensuring an equitable and balanced voice for Disability Services.**

- The current leadership for Milwaukee County Family Care, including the CMO and Resource Center, is from Aging. That has been appropriate since all Family Care enrollees in Milwaukee County have been elders. Now, as younger people with disabilities transition to Family Care, equity is needed to move forward.
- Providing shared leadership with equal status and power for Disability Services and Aging will send a powerful message to people with disabilities and to elders that there is equal respect and an equal voice in Milwaukee County.

**Family Care expansion faces additional challenges to ensure that the state provides adequate resources to meet the significant needs in Milwaukee County:**

- Ensuring an appropriate disability benefit specialist staffing level in Milwaukee County. Adequate initial and ongoing staffing of DBS positions is essential for the success of an Aging and Disability Resource Center.
- Providing adequate staffing for additional Economic Support staff to determine financial eligibility for Family Care. ESD is already significantly understaffed.
- Ensuring adequate resources and qualified staff are available to meet the mental health needs of the expanded population.
- Ensuring that the capitated Family Care rate provided by the state is adequate to fund the system.

**Disability advocates and consumers are committed to working in partnership with Milwaukee County staff to advocate with the state for the needed resources and funding.**

**Proposed Principles**

- A commitment to a Family Care model for younger people with disabilities which recognizes self-determination and consumer-direction as essential elements, ensures the dignity of risk, and makes community-based integrated employment and housing a priority.
- Equity for Disability Services and Aging in the Milwaukee County Family Care staffing, including shared leadership for the CMO and ADRC.
- A collaborative model which provides a real voice in policy decisions for younger people with disabilities and disability advocates. This means providing training and support to those who commit their time to participate.
- A commitment from disability advocates and consumers to work in partnership with the County to advocate with the state for the needed resources and funding.

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