



The Washington State Independent Living Council (WASILC) is a Governor-appointed, statewide council that represents a broad range of individuals with disabilities from diverse backgrounds that are knowledgeable about independent living services. The majority of the council members are individuals with disabilities. WASILC promotes a statewide network supporting the Independent Living (IL) Philosophy for people with disabilities through advocacy, education, collaboration, and planning. The Council is cross-disability and values self-determination, self-sufficiency, consumer control, and independence.

The Independent Living Philosophy emphasizes consumer control, the idea that people with disabilities are the best experts on their own needs. They have crucial and valuable perspectives to contribute and deserve equal opportunities to decide how to live, work, and take part in their communities, particularly in reference to services that powerfully affect their day-to-day lives and access to independence.

WASILC is responsible for collaborating with Centers for Independent Living to create a State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) every three years. To determine the goals of the SPIL, the Council holds public hearings for consumers and stakeholders, to comment on and provide information on the experiences of individuals with disabilities in Washington State.

In October of 2019, WASILC hosted a public forum in Wenatchee, WA. The purpose of this meeting is to listen to and gather information and advice from the disability community, service providers, and the public to hear what is working in the Wenatchee valley and surrounding communities, as well as to identify gaps and barriers. The public forum began with a panel made up of people with disabilities and services providers. Consumers and service providers could address specific issues and engage in a community dialogue on issues that people with disabilities experience. This document is the summary of the conversation and will be shared with locally elected officials, community members, and the State Plan for Independent Living Committee.

Key Issues Discussed

1. Sedation Dentistry: Access to providers in Eastern WA who accept Medicaid and Medicare

The greatest barrier to receiving sedation dentistry in Washington—particularly eastern WA—is access to providers who accept Medicare and Medicaid. There is only *one* dentist in all of eastern WA that accept Medicare/Medicaid and performs sedation dentistry. His office is in Spokane. There are sufficient numbers of dentists and oral surgeons who provide sedation dentistry to those with private insurance or cash payers, but individuals with Medicare or Medicaid insurance must travel to Spokane. This creates a tremendous barrier to anyone who lacks access to the funds and transportation to get there. As a result,



the disability community is disproportionately affected negatively, as many rely on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid benefits.

Oftentimes direct-service providers transport these individuals to and from appointments to Spokane, requiring an entire days' work and wages for staff-members. For example, Mission Vista, a non-profit agency in Wenatchee that provides residential and vocational supports to adults with disabilities, must have a driver and a client assistant in the back seat with the client for the three-hour drive to Spokane, who then stay with the client for the duration of the dental work and recovery. Then they drive three hours back home while the client recovers in the car.

Individuals with disabilities often face challenges in maintaining oral health as well as receiving routine dental work. Certain disabilities make it difficult to brush or floss regularly, may increase anxiety and fear of dental work, or have aversions to being touched, muscle spasms or tics, excessive drooling, hyperactivity, and so forth. For this reason, sedation dentistry is the safest and most accommodating, compassionate option for dental care for many individuals with disabilities.^{1,2}

2. Transportation Accessibility:

A recurring theme in most of our community discussions is the continuing need for transportation. Many individuals in the disability community lack access to transportation altogether; especially in rural areas statewide. When public transportation *is* available, the lack of *accessible* transportation continues to be a barrier to many people with disabilities to maintain consistent employment. Transportation provides a vital lifeline for people with disabilities to access employment, education, healthcare, and community life. Transportation services allow individuals with disabilities to live independently within their communities.

3. Affordable Housing:

“For people with disabilities, there are far too many barriers to housing. Without affordable, accessible housing in the community, many are at risk of institutionalization or homelessness. Across the nation, many people with disabilities are experiencing an affordability crisis. Approximately 4.8 million non-institutionalized people with disabilities who rely on federal monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) have incomes averaging only about \$9,156 per year – low enough to be priced out of every rental housing market in the nation. Many people with intellectual or developmental disabilities live with aging caregivers (age 60 and older). As this generation of caregivers continues to age, many of their adult children with disabilities may be at risk of institutionalization or homelessness.”³



A member of our discussion panel shared that four people on his caseload are currently experiencing homelessness due to a lack of affordable housing. If a person with a disability manages to find housing on a fixed income, they then face the problem of inaccessible housing.

“An accessible home offers specific features or technologies such as lowered kitchen counters and sinks, widened doorways, and wheel-in showers. For people who use mobility devices, finding housing with even basic accessibility features (e.g. an entrance with no steps) can be daunting, if not entirely impossible or unaffordable.

The availability of affordable, accessible housing remains far less than the need, leaving far too many people with intellectual or developmental disabilities institutionalized, homeless, or in “worst case” housing (paying too much in rent to afford other basics or living in severely inadequate conditions).

The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, and national origin. Complaints by people with disabilities often make up the majority of discrimination complaints received by HUD’s Fair Housing Enforcement Office and other fair housing agencies.”³

Panelists and community members also addressed accessibility to the internet, computers, and phones, as well as emergency management and employment. All these issues are interconnected and must be addressed holistically to create equity for individuals with disabilities. All the information presented here are concerns from people that reside in central Washington, have experienced these barriers firsthand, and would like to see progress made in these areas to eliminate these gaps.

References:

¹ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, Developmental Disabilities and Oral Health. (July, 2018). Retrieved October 29, 2019 from <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/developmental-disabilities/more-info>

² National Public Radio (NPR), *Getting Dental Care Can Be a Challenge For People With Disabilities*, (24 October, 2016). Retrieved October 29, 2019 from <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/10/24/498558056/getting-dental-care-can-be-a-challenge-for-people-with-disabilities>

³ The Arc, Policy and Advocacy, Housing, *Why It Matters*, (2019). Retrieved October 30, 2019 from <https://thearc.org/policy-advocacy/housing/>