



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 January of 2020, WASILC hosted a public forum in Olympia, 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**

### **Awareness about Service Availability/Support to Navigate Systems and Access Services**

Many individuals with disabilities agree that knowing where to find useful, pertinent information is challenging. Having knowledgeable providers and case workers is important too. One woman shared her experience about missing out on utilizing an existing program developed to provide transportation assistance that could have saved her several hundreds of dollars in fuel costs needed to get to her medical appointments. This could have helped her tremendously, as she was unable to work during that period—if only her providers knew about the program to tell her about it.



When you don't have connections or support, it creates feelings of hopelessness and anxiety which can exacerbate mental health issues.

A panelist highlighted the need for greater interagency communication. If providers knew more about the assistance programs and navigation systems of other agencies, this would greatly help customers access the most personalized care.

### **Affordable Housing**

Western Washington is experiencing an affordable housing crisis. Prices are high and inventory is low. Fewer landlords are accepting Section 8 vouchers, which provide assistance paying for rent. The money that many people with disabilities receive from programs such as SSDI is not even close to enough to pay for housing here, in addition to other monthly bills.

### **Sense of Community/Isolation**

Panelists shared personal experiences of feeling isolated and lacking a sense of community. One panelist shared their experience of acquiring a disability in adulthood. For a long time, their only community was the doctors and direct service providers who helped them during the rehabilitation phase of recovery. Another woman explained how there is a local senior citizen group she would like to be a part of, but they require annual dues that she cannot afford, as she receives SSDI, which is not enough to pay her basic monthly bills.

There is little research on the relationships between disability, isolation and loneliness, though, especially in the United States. A 2018 U.K. study, "The invisible enemy: disability, loneliness and isolation," Macdonald, Deacon, Nixon, et al, explained the impact of disabling barriers that seem to result in disabled people being overrepresented in the population who are lonely and isolated. When examining risk factors such as spending long periods of time alone [61% disabled, 28% nondisabled]; not cohabiting with a partner [28% of disabled were single vs. 13% nondisabled]; limited contact with family and friends [21% disabled, only 5% nondisabled] and substantial periods of unemployment, [34% unemployment among disabled vs. 6% nondisabled], the disabled group was most likely to report these experiences.<sup>1</sup>

### **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.



Even where accessible public transportation exists, adults with disabilities consider transportation inadequate. In the U.S., 24 million individuals with disabilities use public transit to maintain their independence and participate fully in society. For many, it is their only transit option. Although federal and state legislation encourages more people with all types of disabilities to go to work, getting to work requires transportation. Inadequate transportation inhibits community involvement. Those living in rural areas often face the greatest challenge of all due to total lack of public transportation and long distances between destinations. <sup>2</sup>

#### **References:**

<sup>1</sup> Taylor and Francis Online Journal, The invisible enemy: disability, loneliness and isolation. (19 September 2018). Retrieved March 12, 2020 from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599.2018.1476224>

<sup>2</sup> The Arc, People with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities must have access to both public and private transportation to lead full, independent lives. (2013). Retrieved March 13, 2020 from <https://thearc.org/position-statements/transportation/>