



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707

DATE: 5-19-15

TO: Co-Chairs Darling and Nygren and Members, Joint Finance Committee
FROM: The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

RE: Opposition to Proposed Drug Screening Requirements for BadgerCare Plus Childless Adults

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is comprised of over 30 statewide groups representing people with all disabilities and all ages, their family members, advocates and providers of disability services.

We would like to bring to your attention some very important concerns regarding the proposed changes to BadgerCare contained in the state budget bill. Survival Coalition has concerns about the proposed requirement to screen BadgerCare Plus Childless adults for substance abuse as a condition of BadgerCare eligibility.

Medicaid provides affordable, quality health coverage to individuals with disabilities. Nationally, Medicaid serves over 8 million people with disabilities. Many people with disabilities do not have access to private health insurance or cannot have all of their needs met through private insurance plans—this is especially true for people who rely on non-emergency medical transportation, home care services or need comprehensive mental health and substance abuse services. Medicaid helps people with disabilities see primary care doctors, receive personal care services, go to the dentist, see therapists and obtain other needed medical services and equipment.

In Wisconsin, individuals with disabilities may access the Medicaid program in many different ways. Some people may use a specialized long-term care program such as Family Care or IRIS while others use a more general program like BadgerCare. For example, someone suffering from mental illness or a relapsing condition, such as MS, may not meet the strict functional criteria for long-term care programs even though they are impacted by a disability. BadgerCare is a very important program for these individuals since it gives them access to vital health insurance benefits.

Drug Testing

Survival Coalition has concerns about the provision to require “as a condition of eligibility, that an applicant or enrollee submit to a drug screening assessment and, if indicated, a drug test.” Individuals with disabilities, specifically those with mental illness, are extremely likely to have a co-occurring diagnosis such as a substance abuse disorder.

Our overarching concern related to this provision is that individuals will fear the repercussions of testing positive on a drug test and not apply for BadgerCare. This means that individuals with mental illness or other disabilities that also suffer from addiction may choose to forgo applying for BadgerCare coverage entirely.

Given the lack of details provided in the budget bill regarding the drug screening and testing criteria, we worry that the waiver crafted to implement these changes could completely lock individuals with significant health needs out of the program if they choose to forgo a drug screening or test. We oppose any waiver that includes financial penalties or lock-outs.

We have additional concerns regarding loss of health care access since it appears, from the bill's description of the drug testing and treatment process proposed for programs such as W-2, that individuals who must undergo substance abuse treatment will only be allowed to re-start treatment one time if they test positive during a subsequent test. Would a similar provision be included in the drug testing criteria for BadgerCare Plus Childless Adults? This very restrictive policy is not consistent with what we know of addiction.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Relapse rates for addiction resemble those of other chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and asthma." Individuals suffering from addiction will likely re-start treatment several times. We believe that, as proposed, the drug testing requirements contained in the bill do not reflect evidence-based practice for treatment of addiction.

We agree with the Department's stated goal to "identify individuals with unmet substance abuse disorder treatment needs, and connect those individuals with treatment." However, we feel that there are better ways to achieve this goal than tying access to a health insurance program to the ability to pass a drug test. The evidence-based program of Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) has been utilized widely in Wisconsin. SBIRT relies on motivational interviewing, not drug testing, to help individuals move through the stages of change needed to truly address their addiction issues.

We ask that you delete the drug testing requirements for BadgerCare Plus Childless Adults from the budget bill.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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