

HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE



Wisconsin Council of the
Blind & Visually Impaired

People with vision-related disabilities face significant barriers to health care access and are vulnerable to changes in both the Medicaid and private health insurance systems. Additionally, vision loss is itself a risk factor for a range of physical and mental health conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, depression and anxiety, and individuals with vision loss are at a greater risk for falls.

To address these inequities, we support policies to protect and strengthen health coverage for people living with vision loss.

BUDGET ITEMS

Address Access Issues within the Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired:

Allocate funding to conduct a thorough needs assessment for the Office of the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI) services to bring service provision into line with best practices. Use predictive modeling to project future population numbers and geographic locations to enhance long-range planning for the Office. Direct the

Department of Health Services to develop a strategic plan for the OBVI by the end of fiscal year 2022-23.

Over 100,000 Wisconsinites have a life-shaping visual impairment.

In the next 15 to 20 years, **this number is expected to double.**

Expand Access to Vision Services for Medicaid Members:

Expand the type of certified professionals who can bill Medicaid for vision services. Currently, Medicaid will pay for vision rehabilitation if the services are performed by a licensed occupational therapist (OT). Other highly qualified vision rehabilitation specialists, such as a certified low vision therapist, certified orientation and mobility specialist, certified vision rehabilitation specialist or a certified assistive technology trainer cannot be reimbursed by Medicaid.

Establish a Vision Loss Navigator Program Housed within the DHS Aging and Disability Resources Centers:

These navigators would connect aging adults experiencing vision loss to vital vision rehabilitation services. They would build relationships with eye care professionals and gerontologists throughout the state for referrals, increasing the number of older adults who access vision rehabilitation services.

Establish a voluntary registry of babies and young children with significant vision loss to better connect families with vision-specific early intervention specialists:

Families of children diagnosed with a visual condition during an eye exam would have the opportunity to be entered into an electronic system. They will then be referred to an organization equipped to provide the support they need. The registry would also provide important data to inform policymakers of the level of need statewide for vision services.