



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Pedestrian Safety Month: An Opportunity to Make Communities More Welcoming to Non-Drivers

Since 2021, October has been recognized nationally as Pedestrian Safety Month. Advocates across Wisconsin and the U.S. are taking this opportunity to encourage local leaders to improve pedestrian infrastructure in their communities, making our streets and intersections safer for everyone.

Nearly a third of Wisconsin residents are nondrivers. In addition to people who are blind or low vision, that group includes a wide range of other residents, including people with other disabilities, older adults, students, those unable to afford a car, and people who simply choose not to drive.

For non-drivers, pedestrian safety in their community is literally a matter of life and death. But it is also a quality of life issue.

“Those of us who don’t drive are forced to spend a lot of time and energy thinking about how we are going to travel to the places we need to go,” says Denise Jess, executive director of the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired (WCBVI).

“When somebody who drives needs groceries or has a medical appointment, they take for granted that they can just hop in the car and go. For a nondriver, there is a whole other level of complexity to what may seem like a simple errand to others.”

Jess stresses that while pedestrian safety is a year-round issue, October is a time when people seeking change in their community can coordinate their efforts to maximize their impact. It’s also

important to recognize that it's not just an issue for non-drivers. After all, everyone is a pedestrian some of the time, even when, for example, they're just walking a block from an on-street parking street to a theater.

"Whether folks are seasoned advocates or have never spoken to a public official in their life, this is a great time to reach out to community leaders and voice your concerns," Jess says. "Tell them how inadequate pedestrian infrastructure is affecting your life, and what they can do to improve the situation."

Proven structural improvements Jess points to include:

- Accessible pedestrian signals at intersections, which give pedestrians audio and tactile guidance about when it is safe to cross the street.
- Curb ramps which, when aligned properly, provide a safe transition from the sidewalk into the street.
- Bumpouts, which extend the sidewalk into the roadway at intersections or in the middle of a block.
- Connected sidewalk networks, which enable pedestrians to avoid walking in the street or crossing streets unnecessarily to find a sidewalk.

"Nondrivers shouldn't have to take their life into their hands every time they venture out of their home," Jess says.

"Fortunately, there are straightforward, concrete steps communities can take to make everyone who travels without a car safer."

More information about pedestrian safety and Pedestrian Safety Month are available on the WCBVI website at

<https://wcblind.org/events/pedestrian-safety-month-and-white-cane-safety-day/>.

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