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The issue that's missing from Wisconsin's debate for governor | Tami Jackson and Emily Petersen

About 1.4 million people in Wisconsin are 60 or over, 1.1 million are family caregivers and 450,000 are under age 64 with disabilities.

That's more than half of our state's population.

But when the candidates for governor debate later this month, they won't be asked about the pressing and life-altering issues facing older adults, people with disabilities and families, according to a [summary](#) of the topics the debate moderators plan to discuss.

Our concerns are too often sidelined as special interests, but aging and disability concerns are in everyone's interest. People with disabilities are the [largest](#) minority group in the country — and the only one that anyone can join at any moment or age. By 2050, nearly 3 in 10 Wisconsinites will be aged 60 or older. Every day, families discover the gaps in our health, housing, transportation, long-term care and education systems, and they worry what will happen when they can no longer care for themselves or provide the care that is needed.

Our next governor will set the tone for how aging and disability issues are prioritized over the next four years. We cannot afford to be overlooked.

Our broad coalition — made up of more than 30 statewide disability and aging groups — is holding a nonpartisan [policy forum](#) today to shed light on the issues that directly impact so many of us but are not being addressed.

Our panelists live and work throughout Wisconsin. They know the people walking through their doors, desperately needing help and too often not finding enough or any.

They are people who rely on caregivers every day to live independently and fully. They are people who see the consequences when people struggle to find skilled in-home care or are forced to leave their homes because they are no longer accessible or affordable. They understand the impact when people must leave or cannot start a career because there isn't enough home care.

They know parents who are fighting for their child's education, while worrying whether there is an independent future for their child with a disability and what will happen after they are gone. They see rising threats from the federal government that jeopardize the right of older

adults and people with disabilities to live in their communities and get the care they need to stay there.

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The systems and programs we put in place now, from special education to home care, are the ones that will be there when we or the people we love need them. And all of us will need them.

That's why it's so important for policymakers to understand why the right to live in the community matters, what happens when there aren't enough workers or help for family caregivers, what it means when the housing people need isn't there, and the importance of schools that teach everyone to support difference and put every student on a path to success.

This is a critical moment for people with disabilities and older adults. We encourage elected officials and those seeking office to watch the forum today and learn more about why.

To watch the Disability and Aging Policy Forum today at 11 a.m., go to youtube.com/@WBPDD or to Wisconsin Eye at wiseye.org. The event will be archived for later viewing.

Jackson is co-chair of the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations. Petersen is advocacy and public policy director for the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network.