

# The Arc Minnesota

## 2023 Legislative Agenda



Our legislative priorities address various Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). SDOH are the conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age. Inequities across SDOH have a major impact on people's health, well-being, and quality of life.<sup>i</sup>

## Social and Community Context

### Create More Inclusive Playgrounds for Minnesota Children

Play is a critical part of development for kids of all ages, and children with disabilities should have access to playgrounds, just like all other kids in our communities. However, most playgrounds in Minnesota are not accessible to, nor safe, for children with disabilities. Playgrounds must accommodate physical disabilities and include the unique needs of children with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) as well. Inclusive playgrounds would help ensure that no one is left out, and support the developmental needs of the whole child, including physical, cognitive, sensory, and social development.

**All children should play side-by-side. Investing in bonding projects that help build safe, inclusive playgrounds across Minnesota will result in long-term, positive benefits for all children, and help children with disabilities foster true belonging in community from an early age.**

## Education Access and Quality

### End Suspension and Expulsion for Young Learners

Wide disparities exist in the use of exclusionary discipline, which contribute to poor student outcomes. Students of Color and those with disabilities are excluded, suspended, and expelled at higher rates than their white or nondisabled peers. Our schools are the foundation of collective knowledge and community, and all children deserve to learn in an inclusive, supportive environment without fear of discrimination and harm.

## End Suspension and Expulsion for Young Learners - Continued

**Ending suspensions and expulsions for K-3 students will help create equitable, accessible, and safe schools. All students benefit from positive learning environments that are fully inclusive and address their individual needs. All students benefit when adults model problem-solving over punitive actions. Ending suspensions and expulsions for Minnesota's young learners will help promote alternatives that create a supportive and positive education experience for all students and school staff.**

## Expand Access to Inclusive Higher Education Statewide

Inclusive higher education initiatives can have many positive impacts on young adults with IDD. Those who go to college are more than twice as likely to secure employment, and rely less on government programs and services. The options currently available in Minnesota do not have the capacity to enroll the many transition-age youth who could benefit from and are interested in attending college. Furthermore, institutions of higher education do not have the information nor resources needed to create inclusive higher education initiatives on campus.

**Expanding access to inclusive postsecondary education will help more young adults with IDD secure employment at competitive wages and live in homes of their own. This includes students with IDD attending college classes, gaining work experience, earning meaningful credentials, and becoming a genuine member of the campus community. Providing technical assistance and grant funding to institutions of higher education statewide can help broaden access to inclusive postsecondary education beyond high school and transition.**

## **Economic Stability**

### Reform Medical Assistance to Incentivize Employment

Minnesota's Medical Assistance for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MA-EPD) has been a lifeline for many working-age adults with IDD, allowing them to work without fear of losing important safety net supports. However, MA-EPD premiums are too high and asset limits are too low. This creates a cycle of poverty and deters people from working. People with disabilities should be able to earn money, build and keep assets, and invest in their futures without fear of losing health care, benefits, supports, and services.

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## Reform Medical Assistance to Incentivize Employment - Continued

**Removing the asset limit and shifting the income-based premium schedule to a fair structure will help people with disabilities get out of poverty. Ensuring that people with disabilities are able to work and build financial stability will improve individuals' quality of life and our economy overall. It is critical for people to be able to work while maintaining the safety net supports that help them thrive.**

## **Neighborhood and Built Environment**

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### Increase Affordable, Accessible Housing Options

For adults with disabilities and families with children with disabilities – especially those using a wheelchair – finding affordable, accessible housing in their communities is nearly impossible. Many are forced to turn to costly and isolating settings, instead of living with family or homes of their own. Housing developers and builders need more clarity around a shared definition of accessibility, as well as financial support to ensure they include physically and sensory accessible dwellings in housing projects.

**Creating a shared definition of accessible housing will provide clarity for developers, builders, and people with disabilities. Ensuring that bonding requests for housing projects include physical and sensory accessibility features will support builders and developers to create more inclusive homes. More affordable, accessible housing for disabled Minnesotans and their families will support informed choice and reduce reliance on restrictive and expensive provider-controlled settings.**

### Help More Minnesotans with Disabilities Live in Homes of their Own

There are significant barriers for people with disabilities who want to live in their own homes that currently live in provider-controlled settings, with their family, or other settings they do not prefer. People who currently live in their own homes struggle to remain in place due to lack of support, as well as inflexibility and inequity in our current service options.

**Strategic funding and policy changes can help more Minnesotans with disabilities live in homes of their own. We must address inflexibilities for in-home services and supports by expanding access to shared services for more individuals. We must change inequities in billing for in-home supports to ensure they are more sustainable and accessible to those who need them.**

## Health Access and Quality / Social and Community Context

### Improve Rates for Critical In-Home Services

The lack of Personal Care Assistants (PCAs), home care nurses, and other Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) leads to burnout and lower quality care for people with IDD accessing these services and supports. Low reimbursement rates and inadequate wages create instability for providers and force dedicated PCAs, homecare staff, and other DSPs out of the field. Disabled people lose their trusted, high-quality support professionals, and many have had to move into more restrictive congregate settings. Some people have even lost their lives.

**People with disabilities deserve to live in their own homes with consistent, stable, high-quality support staff. People in these professions deserve to be valued for their important work. Increasing and stabilizing rates for critical in-home services will help ensure we retain these dedicated workers by paying them livable wages to sustain a life for themselves and their families. They must also have benefits that help them stay healthy and well, and support work-life balance.**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>