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For more information, contact:

Minnesota First Provider Alliance
Dena Belisle, President
dena@adenallc.com | 612-328-1152

Metropolitan Center for Independent Living
Jeff Bangsberg, Board Chair
jeffanitabb@gmail.com | 763-438-5805

Jesse Bethke-Gomez, Executive Director
jessebg@mcil-mn.org | 651-603-2012

Urgent action needed as people with disabilities are left out of State's COVID-19 plans

March 18, 2020 (ST. PAUL, Minn.) The emergency package approved by the legislature earlier this week addressed hospitals, clinics and nursing facilities, but did nothing to address the needs of people with disabilities and the frail elderly who live at home. Many cannot get out of bed by themselves and need help with daily activities, such as bathing, dressing, going to the bathroom, eating and taking medications. Some rely on ventilators or other medical equipment, which in-home providers help them use and maintain.

Even if they do not get the virus, people with disabilities continue to need in-home services to get up every day, stay healthy and avoid costly complications that can cause them to need hospital or nursing facility care. Such care is much more expensive than in-home care and is practically unavailable due to COVID-19. For many people with disabilities, in-home services are necessary for their very survival!

The in-home care system was already facing severe workforce shortages due to low wages and low reimbursement of providers. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed further strain on critically needed in-home care services.

Disruptions that are already happening:

- Personal Care Assistants (PCAs) who are willing to work extra hours to fill staffing gaps cannot do so because of overtime limits and lack of funding for overtime.
- PCAs who have passed a background check with one provider agency, cannot go to work for another without passing a second, time-consuming background check.
- Lack of funding for supplies, such as gloves, gowns and masks for PCAs who are concerned about being unwitting carriers of the virus.
- Apartment managers fearful of COVID-19 denying access to PCAs needed by people with disabilities who live in their buildings.
- Scaling back of accessible transportation services people need in order to buy groceries, pick up medications and to get to procedures like dialysis and chemotherapy.

The Legislature must reconvene *this week* to include PCA and other services for people with disabilities, and the frail elderly living at home, in emergency response plans. Legislation is needed to provide regulatory flexibility and funding for overtime pay, extra staffing, protective equipment, and to ensure that unforeseen issues can be addressed as they arise.

Quick action by the legislature is critical to ensuring that people with disabilities are not abandoned as the COVID-19 crisis deepens with each passing day. Many lives depend on swift action to close this gap in emergency response laws.

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