



# Centerpieces

A publication of the Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL)

*Serving People with Disabilities in Southwest Minnesota*

**SPRING 2026 ISSUE**

## **Dental Access Crisis - by Ted Stamp**

### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

- ⇒ **April 20, 5-7 PM  
Prom through the Decades**
- ⇒ **April 27-28, 4-5:30 p.m.  
Driving into Success**

**For updates see  
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Access to dental care is a critical component of overall health. Yet for many Minnesotans insured through Medical Assistance (MA) or Minnesota Care, obtaining even basic dental services remains a persistent challenge.

Over the last year and a half, a SWCIL staff member and some other advocates and volunteers from across the state have made substantial efforts to investigate the extent to which Minnesotans on Medical Assistance (MA) or MN Care insurance lack access to basic dental care.

Although there

seem to be a variety of factors that account for this trend, the chief reason appears to be the low reimbursement rate the State offers dental providers for serving patients on these plans.

And while this unfortunate reality has been known and lamented for decades, the above research has made it clear that this problem is ongoing, and not just locally, but statewide.

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- ⇒ **Parks Accessibility Upgrade**
- ⇒ **Waiver Reimagine**



## Dental Access Crisis ... cont'd

Other than learning from providers whether or not they take the above state insurance plans and whether they are currently accepting new patients, SWCIL discovered (when possible) if providers are in network with other insurance plans, and in many cases which ones. Contact information for these offices was also updated, including the removal of dentists recently retired, or others new to their practice, as well as changes of address, etc. SWCIL then shared this information with the other seven MN CILs, so as to aid their provision of one of the core services of CILs: Information and Referral.

So if you are wondering how many dental providers are available in your city or county, including contact information and whether or not they are taking new patients, etc., call your local CIL and they should have that information available.

Another positive takeaway from having learned of these unfortunate statewide trends is that the data collected through this research is now available to be used by advocates to inform their local legislators of region- and county-specific data that might guide their decision-making regarding policies affecting this topic.

This research also led to important contacts with representatives from the Minnesota Dental Association and DHS, both of whom have staff working on state-appointed committees assigned to problem-solving obstacles to dental access. The Dental Services Advisory Committee (DSAC) and the Dental Advisory Work Group (DAWG) include many members who are dentists themselves, who understand the stakes involved and the necessity of a multifaceted approach to finding viable, long-term solutions. See the MN DHS website for more info about these committees.

Aside from keeping yourself informed, the most important thing you can do to join the effort of helping to make positive change regarding dental access is to contact your local legislative representatives and share your own experiences regarding access to dental care in your area.



Various illustrations of teeth

# Run Your Household by Voice

Do you have physical limitations that restrict your ability to operate household appliances with your arms and hands? Good news: there are affordable solutions available to help you increase your independence and decrease your frustration.

This is made possible through a central hub device like Amazon's Echo Dot or Google's Nest, each of which is set up through their own app on a smart phone. Using either of these devices, a person lacking the physical ability to turn on or off, or adjust the settings of, their lights, television, air conditioner, fan, blinds, or other appliances can do so simply by voice.

For most plug-in appliances, a "smart plug" can be purchased that allows the device to communicate with your cell phone through one of the apps mentioned above. This happens through commands you give to the Dot or Nest hub device and is usually restricted to turning devices on and off.

On the other hand, with a smart TV, a smart plug is not needed, since the hub can communicate with the TV directly (though which brand of TV or hub you have will affect how this works and the range of capabilities you have). And in this case you can do more than just turn a device on and off. You can change volume, channels, select which apps to use, and within each app give navigational directions to select what you want to watch, as well as to play, pause, or move forward or backward within a particular program. Many other types of commands are also possible.

Another recent innovation in the smart technology realm involves window shades and blinds. With these a variety of voice-activated preferences are also possible. For example, directing them to be raised or closed 30 or 50 or 75%, or to have them open or close each day according to the specific sunrise and sunset times where you live.

This is only scratching the surface of the possibilities currently available, but it gives you a starting point to explore ways to increase your independence.



Amazon Echo Ad



Google Nest Ad

# SWCIL Welcomes New Staff Member



Emma Byrne

## Emma Byrne

I've lived in Minnesota for the last 13 years. I'm a mom to a little boy who constantly keeps me busy. Before coming to SWCIL, I worked as a PCA for 6 years, and I'm currently in school for my Bachelor's Degree in Social Work. I love going to movies, going on walks, playing board games, and traveling. I'm looking forward to being a CDCS Support Planner and Independent Living Specialist at SWCIL because I have a strong pull towards advocacy and the belief that everyone has the right to equality and inclusion.

All of SWCIL's programs and services are consumer controlled with an emphasis on improving the quality of life for all people with disabilities. SWCIL's aim is to provide education and awareness to promote inclusion, acceptance and equal access in society for all people with disabilities.

## SWCIL SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Individual and Systems Advocacy
- Independent Living Skills Training
- Prevention of Institutionalization
- Support Planner Services (CDCS)
- Relocation to Community-based Living
- Youth Transition
- Peer Counseling
- Veterans Services
- Ramp Program
- Assistive Technology
- Information and Referral

# Marshall Parks Access Upgrades

Having nice parks to enjoy in one's community is something to appreciate and be thankful for. It's even better when local leaders make accessibility for everyone a priority.

In addition to the many improvements to pedestrian accessibility that have begun to be made to long stretches of sidewalk and multiple intersections across the city of Marshall in 2025 (which will be completed this year), the Parks Department recently completed a grant for replacing the shelter and bathroom at Independence Park. The bathrooms are now ADA-compliant and even include heated floors.

As part of this, two ADA-compliant picnic tables were required to be installed. While these were being ordered, the director of this department, Preston Stensrud, thought it prudent to add some to Marshall's other park shelters as well, purchased through funds from the same department. A total of six were purchased and will eventually be installed, and likely several more will be ordered in 2026.

These tables are eight feet long with six-foot benches, leaving a two-foot overhang of free space on each side, as well as substantial space beneath the table on that end, for wheelchair access. This kind of simple, inclusive design significantly expands access for individuals who often find such picnic tables difficult if not impossible to utilize.



ADA-compliant picnic table with wheelchair seated at one end

Needless to say, these changes are welcome news, and SWCIL applauds the city's continued efforts in this area to make Marshall a good example of what it means to make its public amenities usable and enjoyable for all.

If you have poems, personal successes, letters to the editor, or questions for our readers, send submissions to: [ted.stamp@swcil.com](mailto:ted.stamp@swcil.com); or call 507.532.2221, ext. 101.

# Waiver Reimagine Task Force

In 2025, the Minnesota Legislature created the Advisory Task Force on Waiver Reimagine to continue Minnesota's Department of Human Services' (DHS) Waiver Reimagine initiative. The task force is charged with guiding and improving the redesign of Minnesota's waiver system for people with disabilities.

This task force has started meeting, and its meetings are open to the public. It is scheduled to meet monthly until July 2027.

Task force members will review existing waiver programs and recommend changes based on input from people who use services, family members, state agency representatives, legislators, and other key stakeholders. Members will also focus on waiver structures that promote flexibility and independence, as well as supporting people living in the most integrated settings possible, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Minnesota's Olmstead Plan.

The task force must submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over disability waiver services no later than Jan. 15, 2027.

To follow the task force, you can watch the meetings live on YouTube (Waiver Reimagine Advisory Task Force Workshop). You can also find agendas, summaries, and other meeting materials on the DHS Waiver Reimagine Task Force webpage.



**Find us on Facebook - Like our page  
to keep up with all the latest SWCIL news and events.**

The Southwestern Center for Independent Living (SWCIL) is a community-based non-profit organization serving people with all disability types in the ten counties of southwestern Minnesota.

For more information about SWCIL programs and services, please contact us at: **109 South 5th Street, Suite 700—Marshall, MN 56258 Phone: (507) 532-2221 or (800) 422-1485 (For MN Relay, dial 711) or fax (507) 532-2222.**

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**OUR MISSION STATEMENT:** SWCIL is dedicated to working with and responding to the ever changing needs of persons with disabilities in Southwestern Minnesota to promote societal acceptance, inclusion, and equal access for all persons with disabilities.

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