

Wisconsin Assisted Living Association: Applauds Joint Finance Committee motion to address long-term caregiver shortage crisis

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The Wisconsin Assisted Living Association (WALA) applauds the Wisconsin Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance for voting to invest \$25 million GPR (\$60.5 million all-funds) in the 2017-19 biennial budget to fund increases for the direct care and services component of the Family Care capitation rates. This action will target critically needed increases to address the long-term care workforce crisis.

"We would like to thank the Joint Finance Committee, especially Senator Leah Vukmir (R-Brookfield) and Representative Mike Rohrkaste (R-Neenah), for acknowledging the dire caregiver staffing situation and fighting to bring additional funding to the care providers of Wisconsin," said Jim Murphy, executive director of Wisconsin Assisted Living Association. "And, a special thank you also to Rep. John Nygren (R-Marinette), Rep. Amy Loudbeck (R-Clinton) and Sen. Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) as authors of the omnibus Medicaid Services motion that contained this important provision."

Family Care is a long-term care program that helps frail elders and adults with disabilities. As of September 1, 2016, there were a total of 44,032 Family Care

enrollees, and as statewide expansion occurs over the next two years the number of enrollees is expected to approach 50,000.

Meanwhile, Wisconsin faces a crisis in the shortage of available frontline caregivers.

The Long-

Term Care Workforce Crisis: A 2016 Report, the largest survey of Wisconsin's assisted living

and long-term care facility providers in the state's history, included the following key findings:

- Approximately 87,000 Wisconsin residents live in 4,284 long-term care facilities. Residents living in these facilities rely on an estimated 73,700 caregivers. The number of Wisconsin residents living in long-term care facilities has grown 18% since 2003.
- Wisconsin is experiencing high levels of caregiver vacancy rates in long-term care facilities: average caregiver vacancy rates are 14.5%, with 1 in 4 providers experiencing vacancy rates of 20% and higher. There are an estimated 11,500 vacant caregiver positions in Wisconsin assisted living and nursing facilities.
- Wisconsin's providers are facing major problems finding applicants and qualified caregivers: more than 30% of providers felt they were unable to compete with other employers; nearly 50% had no applicants for vacant caregiver positions; 70% said there were no qualified applicants for caregiver openings; 18% have been forced to deny admissions due to the lack of caregivers.
- There is a significant wage disparity between people working as trained personal caregivers and unskilled entry-level workers taking jobs at gas stations, big-box stores, and fast food restaurants: providers reported a median hourly starting wage for personal caregivers of \$10.75 compared to \$12.00 for local, non-health care employers seeking unskilled, entry-level workers.
- There has been an exodus of caregivers to jobs outside of healthcare: providers report widespread use of overtime, double shifts and other strategies to deal with scheduling gaps; 4 of 5 personal caregivers who took jobs outside of health care left for better pay, better benefits and/or better hours.