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U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Co-sponsors legislation to invest in care economy, fund healthcare workers and home and community-based services

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WISCONSIN — Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) is among the 40 U.S. Senators who co-sponsored the Better Care Better Jobs Act, historic legislation that would expand access to home and community-based services for seniors and people with disabilities, boost wages and strengthen protections for home care workers, and empower families and individuals to choose the care option that works best for them. President Biden has made it clear that investing in home and community-based services is a top priority for his administration, and the Better Care Better Jobs Act is a critical step towards expanding access to these critical services.

Today, over 3.7 million older adults and people with disabilities nationwide benefit from the HCBS program through Medicaid. The Wisconsin service population includes over 130,000 residents who need assistance. Additionally, 580,000 family caregivers in Wisconsin provide 490 million hours of care to family members age 18 and over. Wisconsin will need to fill over 123,500 additional home care job openings by 2028.

This legislation is meant to address existing issues with coverage availability, eligibility, and benefit standards — all factors that vary depending on state — create coverage gaps and limits on the number of people who can access these services.

In fact, these gaps have kept roughly 820,000 people on wait lists to enroll for services, most waiting an average of over 3 years.

The Better Care Better Jobs Act is supported by more than 50 national and regional home-based care organizations. While Democrats in Congress, like Senator Baldwin, have signed on to cosponsor the legislation, Republican Senator Ron Johnson has not pledged his support for the bill — a powerful signal to Wisxonsin's home care workers, and the Wisconsinites they care for that investing in these critical services is not a priority.

New federal investments in Home and Community-Based Services are needed to ensure that all who prefer to receive care in the community have access to it. Under the proposed legislation, qualifying states would be eligible for a permanent 10 percentage point increase in the federal Medicaid match for delivering HCBS as well as enhanced funding for administrative activities associated with improvement efforts.

States will be required to expand coverage for personal care services and support for family caregivers, adopt programs that help people navigate enrollment and eligibility, expand access to behavioral health care, and improve coordination with housing, transportation, and employment support; thus improving health holistically for all people. There are also provisions in place to improve attraction, retention, and compensation of home care workers, especially those showing improvements in reducing disparities.

Read more about the Better Care Better Jobs Act here.