



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, May 26, 2017

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

Sarah Bass, Wisconsin Assisted Living Association
(608) 288-0246

Wisconsin Assisted Living Association Applauds Joint Finance Committee Motion to Address Long-Term Caregiver Shortage Crisis

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 Loudenberg (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 44,032¹ 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*,² 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.³ 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

¹ <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/familycare/reports/enrollmentdata.pdf>

² [The Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis: A 2016 Report](#)

³ Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Quality Assurance, State of Assisted Living – CY 2015, March, 2016

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.

###