

Support by Wisconsin's Joint Finance Committee Will Help Long-Term Care

As those who have leadership roles in nursing facilities in Wisconsin, we see the many challenges facing nursing facilities and the long-term care continuum of care. Low Medicaid reimbursement rates, the ability to staff facilities and access issues are some of the major challenges facing nursing homes and long-term care providers. Since January of this year, 11 nursing facilities have closed, bringing the total to 30 nursing facilities that have closed since 2016. As you see, the challenges are serious. However, Wisconsin's budget committee, more commonly known as the Joint Finance Committee, has heard the concerns of the provider community and responded with strong support.

Led by co-chairs of the committee, State Representative John Nygren (R-Marinette) and State Senator Alberta Darling (R-River Hills), the committee approved \$233.7 million in state funding for long-term care as part of the 2019-21 state budget bill. This significant two-year investment will go a long way toward addressing low Medicaid rates that have contributed to nursing facility closures and challenges in recruiting and retaining high quality caregivers.

Here is a brief description of their support.

- ✓ \$74 million biennial increase in the nursing home Medicaid reimbursement rate will begin to close the gap between the actual cost of care and the amount some 365 facilities receive from the state.
- ✓ \$91 million will allow for a much-needed increase in the reimbursement rate for personal care services to allow providers to begin to address the long-term care workforce crisis, where 1 in 5 caregiver positions remains vacant in Wisconsin.
- ✓ \$67 million in state and federal Medicaid reimbursement for funding of Family Care Direct Care, a program that provides services to help people live in their home whenever possible.
- ✓ 8 dementia care specialists and one tribal dementia care specialist would be provided through a \$1.7 million increase over two years. (Medicaid serves 1 in 4 of the estimated 115,000 people in Wisconsin with dementia, and the number of people affected is expected to increase dramatically as the Baby Boomer generation ages).

The Joint Finance Committee prioritized meaningful support for Wisconsin's long-term care system so that senior and disabled populations will have increased access to the personal care and residential skilled nursing services they need.

We want to thank State Representative John Nygren, State Representative Shannon Zimmerman, and all members of the Joint Finance Committee who voted in favor of these much-needed resources for their commitment to older adults and persons with a disability in Wisconsin.

It is now up to the Legislature and Governor Tony Evers to approve this critically needed boost in long-term care funding to ensure the ongoing viability of long-term care programs and services in Wisconsin. We strongly encourage Governor Evers to join these legislators to show that there is bipartisan support and commitment to continue providing high quality care to the state's most vulnerable citizens.

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