

# Family Caregivers:

A wise investment for our families, communities and health and long-term care systems.

## Core Member Organizations

- Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW)
- Alzheimer's Association SE Wisconsin Chapter
- Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (WADSA)
- Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (W4A)
- Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (WABS)
- Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (WAND)
- Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (WASC)
- Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA)
- Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA)
- Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network is a collaborative group of individuals and associations working with and for Wisconsin's older adults to shape public policy to improve their quality of life.

**WAAN State Issue Brief**  
April 2019

**WAAN's Position: Strengthen support for family caregivers by passing the CARE Act, creating a tax credit for family members spending personal resources to care for a loved one, and expanding dementia care specialist services statewide.**

**1. Passing the CARE Act.** The Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable (CARE) Act includes provisions to keep family caregivers informed about the patient's treatment and ensure caregivers receive explanation and live instruction of the medical tasks the family caregiver will perform at home.



**2. Creating a tax credit for family members spending personal resources to care for a loved one.** A Wisconsin state nonrefundable individual income tax credit for expenses—like assistive technology and adult day services—will ease some of the financial expenses of caregiving and support family caregivers who help pay for needed equipment and services for their loved ones.



**3. Expanding dementia care specialist services statewide.**

Dementia Care Specialists (DCSs) provide vital services to assist individuals with dementia to remain active and in their own homes and communities, support for caregivers of people with dementia, ongoing education to ADRC/aging staff to help them to be better prepared to serve and support individuals with dementia and their families, and act as a catalyst for the creation of dementia-friendly communities.

### Care Gap

As we live longer and healthier lives, many of us are taking steps to prevent or delay the need for long-term care services. Despite these actions, a variety of factors have led to an increasing number of older adults who need care now and an even larger number who are expected to need care in the future.

The fastest growing population of older adults are those age 80 and older, the age when we are more likely to have mental or physical impairments that require us to need help with our care. The growing population of people

“In Wisconsin, nearly 600,000 of our friends, neighbors and relatives are providing care to a loved one at home.<sup>1</sup>”



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needing care in Wisconsin (including a projected 60% increase in the number of people living with dementia between 2015 – 2023)<sup>1</sup>, coupled with shrinking family size, fewer people having children, geographically dispersed families, and an increasing number of family caregivers who are employed, has created a gap between the demand for family caregivers and the available supply<sup>2</sup>. The gap in care grows even wider when factoring in that eldercare is projected to be the fastest-growing employment sector within the health care industry, yet the number of workers in many eldercare professions is declining<sup>3</sup>.

### **Caregivers Save Money for the Health Care and Long-Term Care Systems**

Caring for a loved one can be very rewarding. It is also one of the most challenging and demanding jobs anyone will ever do and a job that is likely to negatively impact one's finances. Family caregivers enable our older family members and friends to stay at home, where costs are lowest and where they want to be. They perform a variety of caregiving duties—including help with bathing, dressing, feeding, medication management, wound care, and transportation. The value of this care is estimated at \$7 billion per year.<sup>4</sup> This is a cost our health and long-term care systems cannot afford to cover, making the need to support the work of family caregivers even more critical.

**1.** Family caregivers are also a key source of information about their loved ones' health histories, treatments, medications, and allergies. They play an important role in assisting family members to communicate with health and long-term care providers. Yet, too often, caregivers find some of these same provider organizations exclude them from critical care planning and treatment discussions, preventing them from successfully participating as valued members of the care team.

**2.** The availability of family caregiving cannot be assumed without adequate support services that consider both the individual and the family. Caregiving, especially when it involves an intensive commitment over the long-term, carries significant emotional, physical and financial costs. Caregivers are often faced with making life-altering decisions about where to live, whether to reduce their work hours, change jobs, and/or even leave the workforce to attend to caregiving responsibilities. In addition to lost wages and benefits, caregivers often need to spend their own personal finances to help meet the care needs of a loved one. A recent study revealed that 7 in 10 caregivers reduced their own living expenses to cover caregiving costs.<sup>5</sup>

**3.** Family caregivers cannot provide increasingly complex care without support. DCSs available across the state can help ensure individuals with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias are connected to appropriate diagnostic and treatment centers, while also ensuring care is safe and cost-effective and helping family members who are providing care receive the resources they need to care for their loved ones. Improved recognition and support will help family caregivers better maintain their own health, financial security, and well-being.

## Family Caregivers:

### References

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