



**Testimony of  
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**AB 64/SB 30, Governor's 2017-19 Biennial Budget**

**Oral Testimony Provided Before the Wisconsin Joint Committee on Finance on April 7, 2017  
Full Written Testimony Submitted April 28, 2017**

Senator Darling, Representative Nygren, and Committee Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Governor's 2017-19 State budget. My name is Janet Zander. I am the Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator for the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR), one of three Area Agencies on Aging in Wisconsin. Our agency provides training and technical assistance to support the successful delivery of aging programs and services in 70 counties (all but Dane and Milwaukee) and the 11 tribes in Wisconsin. I am also commenting on behalf of the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN), a collaborative group of older adults and professional aging associations and organizations – including the Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging, the Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers, the Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors, the Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialist, the Aging & Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (representing aging unit/ADRC directors and managers), the Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association, the Alzheimer's Association SE Wis. Chapter and the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA).

Older adults reside in significant numbers in communities throughout Wisconsin. Your investment in the programs and services that support older adults can help them to remain living at home, active in their communities, and contributing to the economy.

Two of the investments needed are requests to continue successful prevention programs started in earlier budgets, but not yet funded in the 2017-19 budget. The Dementia Care Specialist program is the one of the prevention programs we are asking you to support. This program housed within Aging & Disability Resource Centers and tribes currently has 19 Dementia Care Specialists (DCSs) in various areas of the state covering 54% of the older adult population. These DCSs provide specialized education to staff within the ADRC, providers, individuals with dementia and families. They offer in-home consultation, including crisis planning and prevention work, as well as opportunities for individuals with dementia and family caregivers to participate in evidence-based interventions. DCSs assist with community coalition building and efforts to create dementia-friendly communities including training for law enforcement, fire and rescue, and hospitals so they are prepared to meet the needs of the people they serve. Their work includes helping to raise awareness among community businesses, employers, and other community organization of the unique needs of people with dementia and their families. Funding for the Dementia

Care Specialist program from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services is set to end on Dec. 31, 2017. **We encourage you to support funding for the Dementia Care Specialist program in the 2017-19 budget to not only ensure services continue in the areas currently served by the existing 19 DCSs, but to expand the program statewide to bring these essential services to the remaining areas of the state currently unserved by the program.** Dementia Care Specialists help people with dementia stay living in their communities and out of expensive institutional care (saving taxpayers \$161/day for each person needing Medicaid funding). Over the next two decades, the number of individuals living with dementia is anticipated to more than double. Investments in the Dementia Care Specialist program now provide substantial returns now and in the future. For full proposal details see [Dementia Care Specialist Fact Sheet](#).

The second prevention program in need of continued funding is the Healthy Aging Grants that support evidence-based health promotion programs that help individuals learn to manage their chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis; reduce their risk for falls, and improve their health. These programs help individuals delay or avoid the need for expensive long-term care. Funding was authorized in the 2015-17 Biennial Budget for Healthy Aging Grants. Those funds were used to support the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA), statewide program leader trainings, outreach materials, data collection and analysis, assistance in developing broad partnerships, and volunteer stipends for leaders at the local level. The Healthy Aging Grants fund programs that have proven positive health outcomes and save health and long-term care dollars. Unfortunately, despite these savings, the Governor did not include funds to continue this upstream work in his budget. **Please support continued funding of Healthy Aging Grants at an amount of \$600,000 in each year of the budget to expand programming at the local level, reach more individuals and increase partnerships to improve the health and well-being of older adults.** For full details of our request see [Healthy Aging Grants issue brief](#).

To improve access to needed services, we are asking you to **increase your investment in funding for specialized transportation – s.85.21 by 3.75% in each year of the budget to keep pace with Wisconsin’s aging population.** Specialized transportation programs provide older adults and people with disabilities the opportunity to remain living in their own homes and engaged in their communities. Wisconsin’s nationally recognized home- and community-based long-term care services, evidence-based health promotion programs, caregiver supports and services, and the older adults who participate in these programs and wish to remain active in their communities depend upon reliable, accessible and affordable transportation. Transportation programs play an integral role in helping people remain independent. For more information see [Specialized Transportation issue brief](#).

In addition, **your support is needed to address the direct care workforce crisis and improve access to Medicaid funded personal care services.** The direct care workforce crisis is impacting individuals in need of care, their families, direct care workers, as well as agencies and facilities. The shortage of direct care workers is leaving families without options and older adults and people with disabilities without needed care. Direct care workers make it possible for older adults and people with disabilities to lead safe and healthy lives in the community, where they prefer to be, in the most cost-effective setting. High worker turnover rates and growing job vacancies impact both access to care and quality of care. **We ask you to support the Governor’s proposal to increase the Medicaid Personal Care fee-for-service rate, but encourage you to increase the rate to reflect the 15% needed to ensure that home care services remain an option for all who need them now and in the future.** For more information see [Direct Care Workforce Crisis Fact Sheet](#).

GWAAR and WAAN recognize the increasing number of older adults living with dementia and therefore, **support the Governor's proposal to increase funding in the budget for Alzheimer's research at UW – Madison Alzheimer's Disease Research Center.** The Governor's budget also includes positive changes to the Medicaid program supported by GWAAR/WAAN including an increase in the nursing home provider rate offering greater support for care for residents with increased behavioral or cognitive issues. We strongly support increasing the financial eligibility limit for medically-needy elderly, blind, or disabled individuals to 100% of the federal poverty level. This change will help medically needy older adults receive much needed services. We are supportive of changes made to the Medical Assistance Purchase Plan (MAPP) related to requiring all participants to pay at least a \$25 premium per month, though we have concerns regarding the more strenuous work requirements and tax-filing requirements which could cause some participants to lose their MAPP eligibility.

GWAAR and WAAN have been championing efforts to get annual indexing of the Homestead Tax Credit for many years and would support this positive change in the budget; however, we do not support other program changes in eligibility or formulas proposed in the Governor's budget. See WAAN's [Homestead Tax Credit issue brief](#).

Last, but certainly not least, we fully support the Governor's budget proposal to provide funding and positions for the Board on Aging and Long Term Care (BOALTC) to provide ombudsman and advocacy services to individuals age 60 and older who are enrolled in, or are potentially eligible to enroll in the IRIS (Include, Respect, I Self-Direct), the state's self-directed long-term care program.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on these important issues and proposals. We look forward to continuing to work with you to shape public policy that improves the quality of life for older people throughout the state.