

Family Caregivers

A vital and cost-effective support system

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)

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
July 2016

WAAN's Position: Strengthen support for caregivers by passing the CARE Act, creating a tax credit for those shouldering the financial burden of caring for a loved one and expanding dementia care specialist services statewide.

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

In Wisconsin approximately 578,000 people are providing family caregiving to a loved one at home. The value of this care is estimated at \$7 billion and demographic shifts are driving even more need as roughly 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 every day.* The work of these caregivers enables older Wisconsinites to stay where they want to be and where costs are the lowest: In their homes. Family caregivers perform a variety of caregiving duties—including help with bathing and dressing, feeding, medication management, wound care, and transportation. By providing this care, family caregivers save taxpayer dollars by helping to prevent or delay their loved ones' needs for more costly residential care and unnecessary hospital readmissions.



Cost to the Caregiver

In 2013 family caregivers in Wisconsin provided 538 million hours of care. Many studies report a significant correlation between caregiving and psychological and physical health. Those who serve as family caregivers to older relatives report higher levels of stress and poorer health than the population at large. A recent AARP study reports over half of the caregivers surveyed reported being overwhelmed by the amount of care their family member needs. On top of stress, poor health, and loss of personal time,

*<http://states.aarp.org/wi-caregivers-provide-7-billion-in-unpaid-care-sc-wi-wp-advocacy/#sthash.jRv56kAA.dpuf>

providing care can also cause significant financial strain. Nearly 70% of family caregivers have used their own money to help care for their loved one and nearly 4 in 10 family caregivers felt financially strained by these costs.

Increasing Complex Care Needs

Wisconsin's population is aging—increasing the need for family caregiving. Caregivers are increasingly responsible for administering medical or nursing care to family members, but are often not trained in how to provide this complex care or are left out of treatment decisions. Family caregivers' needs should be assessed as part of the care planning process and caregivers should be included in the planning process as appropriate. Dementia care specialists (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 helping to ensure that care is safe and cost-effective and making sure family members who are providing care (which can be especially overwhelming and stressful when caring for someone with dementia) receive the resources they need to care for their loved ones. However, Wisconsin currently has only 19 DCSs serving 26 counties and 3 tribes.

Supporting Family Caregivers

Family caregivers face increasing challenges—lack of time, loss of income, health problems, and stress. An increasing number of people will find themselves facing these challenges as the population ages and more adults find themselves in the role of family caregiver. We must address these challenges immediately. Specific measures include:

- **Pass 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.
- **Create a Wisconsin state tax credit to ease the financial burden of caregiving.** A Wisconsin income tax credit for qualified caregiving expenses—like assistive technology and adult daycare—will reduce financial strain on family caregivers.
- **Expand the number of dementia care specialists** to cover every ADRC in Wisconsin. DCSs provide vital services to assist individuals with dementia to remain active and in their homes, support ADRC staff and county and tribal programs to be better prepared to support individuals with dementia and their families, and to act as a catalyst for the creation of dementia-friendly communities.



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