



**Written Testimony of  
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On behalf of the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc. (GWAAR) and  
the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN)**

**AB 56/SB 59 Governor's 2019-21 Biennial Budget**

**Submitted April 28, 2019**

Co-Chairs Darling and Nygren and members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Governor's 2019-21 Biennial State budget. These comments are submitted on behalf of the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR), one of three Area Agencies on Aging in Wisconsin. As an Area Agency on Aging, GWAAR 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, Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers, Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors, Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists, Wisconsin Senior Corps Association, Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association, Aging & Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (representing aging unit/ADRC directors and managers), Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association, Alzheimer's Association SE Wis. Chapter, and Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging.

Wisconsin's Aging Network of home and community-based service providers assist adults age 60 and older to improve their health and well-being to live with maximum independence and dignity. The population of older adults in Wisconsin is projected to grow by 32% (over 400,000 people) from 1,266,860 to 1,671,010 between 2015 and 2025. Additionally, the Alzheimer's Association estimates 110,000 Wisconsinites age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's. By 2025, this number is expected to increase to 130,000 (18% increase). The Wisconsin Department of Health Services has identified that 1 in 4 residents living with dementia are served by Wisconsin's Medicaid programs. Investing in programs and services that support older adults to remain living at home, active in their communities, and contributing to the economy is good for the state budget and good for older adults, their families, and our communities.

The Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR) and the Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) request your support of the following investments:

**Support the Governor's budget proposals to:**

1. Strengthen support for family caregivers and individuals living with dementia by **expanding dementia care specialist (DCS) services statewide** to ensure critical programs and services are accessible to all who need them no matter where they live - [DCS Fact Sheet](#), and

2. Improve transportation services to ensure needed systems and services are available to meet our mobility needs as we age by **increasing the County Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance program (specialized transportation -s.85.21) by 20% and providing a 10% increase for Tribal Elderly Transportation Assistance (s.85.215) and Transit Operating Assistance (s.85.20) programs** - [Transportation Issue Brief](#).

**Amend the Governor's budget by increasing proposals to:**

3. Address the workforce shortages in home and residential service settings and help agencies and providers stay in business so older adults and people with disabilities have quality options to receive care where they want and need it by **increasing Medicaid provider reimbursements, to raise the wages of direct care workers providing Medicaid Personal Care (MAPC), above the 1.5 % in each year of the budget (\$0.51 over the biennium) currently included in the Governor's budget to 37% (which raises the MAPC rate from \$16.73 to \$23/hour) as needed to raise worker wages to \$15/hour.** An 11% increase is needed just to prevent the *collapse* of Wisconsin's community-based direct care provider network. GWAAR and WAAN also request your support of the Governor's proposed funding to **increase the direct care and services portion of the capitation rates** (by an additional \$14.8 million in each year) **the department provides to long-term care managed care organizations (Family Care MCOs) and a 1.5% increase for nursing homes targeted to the direct care workforce** - [Direct Care Workforce Support Issue Brief](#).
4. Support researched and proven programs that improve health, reduce costs, and prevent or delay the need for long-term care by **increasing the budget appropriation from \$250,000** (currently proposed in the budget and less than one-third of what is needed to fully support program expansion) **to \$870,000 each year for healthy aging to counties/tribes, YMCAs, and other community based organizations for proven programs and to support a statewide clearinghouse and support center to broaden the reach and impact of proven programs** - [Healthy Aging Grants Issue Brief](#).

**Amend the Governor's budget by adding proposals to:**

5. Strengthen support for family caregivers who 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 by **creating a tax credit for family members spending personal resources to care for a loved one.** Caregivers spend thousands of dollars out of their own pockets each year to meet the care needs of loved ones and many of these caregivers needed to reduce their own living expenses to cover caregiving costs - [Family Caregiver Support Issue Brief](#).
6. Stop the erosion of important legal advocacy services to adults age 60 and older across Wisconsin and meet the increased demands for access to highly trained experts helping older persons with the extensive and complicated paperwork that is often required in benefit programs by **increasing state funding for the Elder Benefit Specialist (EBS) program funding from \$2,298,400 to \$4,596,800.** The EBS program has not seen an increase in state funding in 22 years, during this time there has been nearly a 63% increase in the population served by the program, increasing demand for EBS services, and increasing complexities associated with access to essential benefit programs - [Elder Benefit Specialist Program Issue Brief](#).

In addition to the previously mentioned budget priorities, GWAAR requests your support to **keep the following budget proposals** in the 2019-21 Biennial State budget:

- **BadgerCare Expansion** which will: provide affordable health insurance coverage to individuals age 60 – 64 (pre-Medicare) with incomes between 100% - 138% of the Federal Poverty Level, help address the direct care workforce shortage by allowing low-wage workers to earn additional income (by providing additional hours of much needed care) and still keep their health care, provide health care coverage for more family caregivers who have reduced their work hours or left the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities, and provide much needed funding to reinvest into critical health services for older adults and people with disabilities (\$324.5 million in state savings and an estimated \$1.6 billion in new federal funding leveraged by expanded programs and services).
- A \$45 million investment in **community health benefits for nonmedical services for Medicaid members** to reduce and prevent health disparities that result from economic and social determinants of health. These services include but are not limited to housing referral services, stress management, nutritional counseling, and transportation services (see GWAAR's attached documents highlighting the benefits of providing two of these important nonmedical services – nutrition services and transportation – on the health of individuals and communities).
- **Reimbursement rate increases to dental providers that serve Medicaid recipients,**
- Funding allocated to provide **additional positions** in the Department of Health Services' Bureau of Assisted Living **in the Division of Quality Assurance and Ombudsman supervisor positions in the Board on Aging and Long-Term Care** to address the increasing numbers of assisted living facilities and better serve consumers of Wisconsin long-term care programs,
- Adequate **broadband access to all Wisconsin residents by 2025,** and
- **Changes to the Homestead Tax Credit including indexing the tax credit for inflation** to preserve the credit's value **and increasing the maximum income threshold to \$30,000/year.**

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.

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