The Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis:

A 2020 Report

Results from a survey of long-term care providers in 2016 and 2018 exposed a caregiver workforce crisis. Data from the 2020 survey of 924 providers, together with information from other sources revealed:

- An increase in caregiver vacancies from 19% in 2018[1] to 23.5% in 2020
- A continued downward trend in the number of persons on the Wisconsin nurse aide registry[2]
- Caregiver vacancy rates in excess of 30% for adult family homes, a vital part of the long-term care continuum
- One in three providers are limiting admissions due to caregiver vacancies
- Since 2018, inflation has increased by 4%[3] while median wages for direct care workers have been limited to only 2.3% growth
- The average occupancy of long-term and residential care providers could increase from 78% to 93% if there were enough caregivers to fill available positions
- Long-term care providers continue to be challenged with a lack of applicants for caregiving positions

Clearly the caregiver workforce crisis continues to be one of the most significant challenges facing providers of long-term and residential care services. Public and private efforts to deal with the workforce needs have helped but more needs to be done - especially as the state faces growth in the number of older persons, people with intellectual and physical disabilities, and individuals diagnosed with dementia.

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Wisconsin Health Care Association
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WALA
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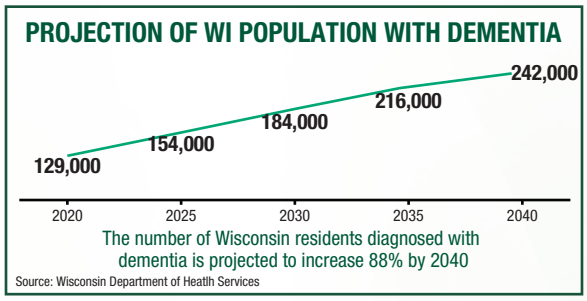
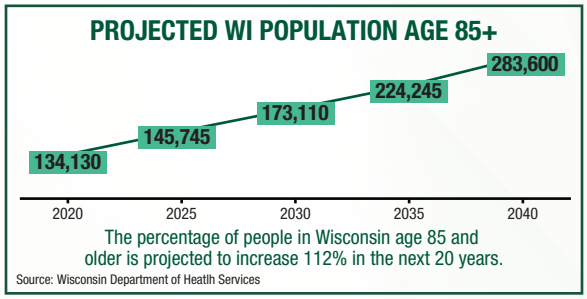
LeadingAge Wisconsin
Better Services for Better Aging

Disability Service Provider Network
Stronger together through partnership and advocacy

The Need for Long-Term Care is Growing

Over the next 20 years, the percentage of people age 85 and older will climb, as will the number of persons diagnosed with dementia. A sizable number of these two groups are likely to need long-term care services. In addition, more than 33,880 persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities and physical disabilities require some level of care or support[4].





Scope of the Crisis

A 2016 and 2018 survey of long-term and residential care providers established the existence of a workforce crisis. The 2020 survey confirms the workforce crisis remains a significant challenge.

- **23.5%** average caregiver vacancy rate (14.5% in 2016[5] and 19% in 2018[1])
- **42%** of providers (30% in 2018[1]) are facing a caregiver vacancy rate in excess of **25%**
- **1 in 3** providers (1 in 5 in 2018[1]) are experiencing caregiver vacancy rates **30% and higher**
- **20,655** vacant caregiver positions in Wisconsin long-term and residential care facilities, up from 16,500 in 2018[1]
- Adult Family Homes are experiencing caregiver vacancy rates **in excess of 30%**
- Nursing homes are experiencing registered nurse and licensed practical nurse vacancy rates of **nearly 22%**

1 in 4 Caregiving staff positions are unfilled ...why?

Nearly **50%** of respondents felt they were unable to compete with non-healthcare employers

1 in 2 said they couldn't increase wages because of inadequate Medicaid and Family Care reimbursement

More than **1 in 3** providers report not getting even a single application for available caregiver positions

70% said there were no qualified applicants for caregiver openings

State and federal CNA training regulations fail to recognize the severity of the caregiver workforce crisis, creating additional barriers for people to enter the caregiving profession

Provider Comments:

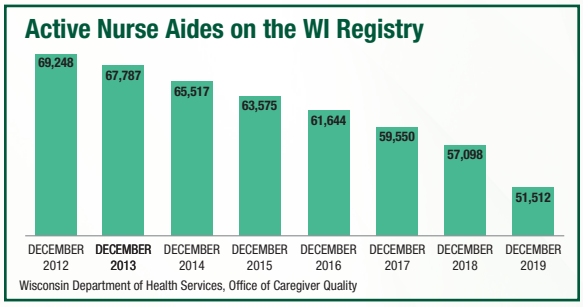
- *Other employers in our area are able to offer much better wages, vacation time, and other benefits we cannot afford.*
- *Many applicants go through orientation and then do not show up for shifts.*
- *No one responds to hiring advertisements.*
- *Employees on BadgerCare limit the number of hours they work, otherwise they will lose their insurance.*

Why Is There A Crisis in LTC?

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development projects the annual growth in personal care and service occupations at 17.68%[6].

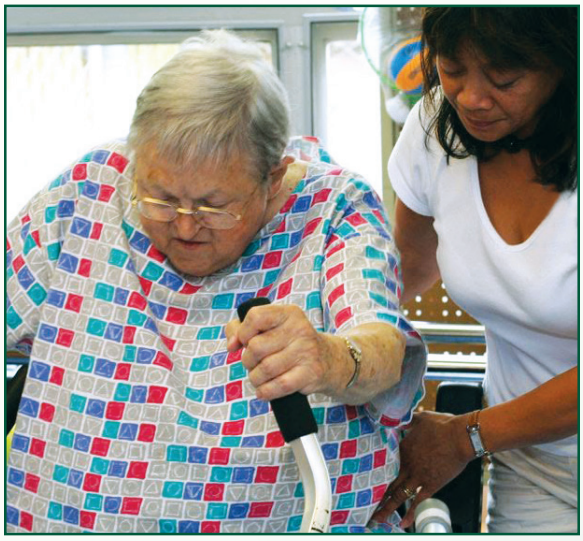
And yet, caregivers continue to leave long-term care

- An estimated **9,700** caregivers left for jobs outside of healthcare in the past year
- **64%** of providers reported staff left caregiving positions for work in non-healthcare settings
- Since 2012, there are **17,736** fewer nursing assistants on the Wisconsin Nurse Aide Registry, a decline of more than **25%**[7]
- In 2019 there were **5,586** fewer nursing assistants listed on the Nurse Aide Registry than in 2018; more than double the previous year's decline



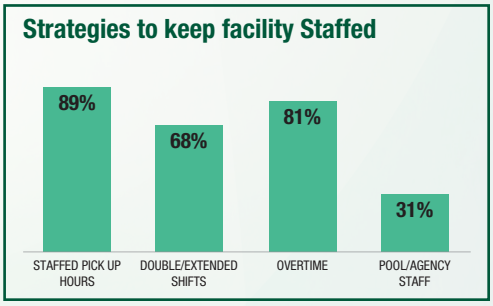
Competition for workers is intense and the workforce is changing

- Wisconsin's low **3.3%** unemployment rate[8] has ramped up competition for workers
- Providers reported median wages of $13.00 per hour for non-healthcare employers hiring unskilled entry level workers, an 8.3% increase from 2018[1]
- During that same period, providers were only able to increase direct care worker wages by 2.3% due to insufficient Medicaid and Family Care reimbursement
- Licensed nurses, a vital part of the long-term care workforce, are aging:
  - More than **1 in 3** registered nurses working in nursing homes and extended care settings are age 55 and older[9]
  - **43.5%** of licensed practical nurses working in these settings are age 55 and older[10]



Providers Are Trying to Cope

- **1 in 3** providers limited admissions in the past year because of staffing vacancies compared with 1 in 4 in 2018, and 1 in 5 in 2016
- Survey respondents reported working with fewer staff than they would prefer
- Some providers limit benefits due to insufficient Medicaid and/or Family Care reimbursement. More than **70%** do not offer health insurance to part-time employees



The research continues to show:

- The staffing crisis remains a significant challenge: One-third of providers are experiencing vacancy rates of 30% and higher, compared with one-fifth in 2018[1]
- Providers are still struggling to compete for workers: The median wage for entry level non-healthcare workers is $2.00 per hour higher than for direct care workers
- Caregiver burnout is a real concern: Caregivers are working extra shifts and overtime to cover open shifts
- Nearly two-thirds of caregivers who left long-term care went to work in non-healthcare settings
- Nearly half the time, providers receive no applications for caregiver positions and, when they do, more than 70% lack the necessary qualifications

Long-term care workers are vital:

- Caregiving is not something everyone can do, and those who can are extraordinary people
- Long-term and residential care residents depend on caregivers to keep them safe and provide the care, service, and support they need to thrive
- Caregivers strive to treat residents living in long-term care and residential care facilities with dignity and respect
- Caregivers deserve a fair wage and benefits for the important work they do

What must be done to assure there are enough caregivers?

- The Wisconsin Legislature and Governor approved the 2019-2021 Biennial Budget which included a continuation of the Direct Care Workforce Funding initiative as well as a Medicaid Fee for Service rate increase for long-term and residential care providers. It was a step in the right direction, but the ongoing crisis requires continued legislative action.
- Renew the WisCaregiver Careers program and extend the effort to residential care providers.
- Enhance access to the caregiver profession by adjusting Wisconsin's CNA hourly training requirements to match the federal standard of 75 hours, a standard also adopted by Minnesota, Michigan, and Iowa.
- Continue to encourage and support youth, adults returning to the job market, and members of the immigrant community to pursue careers in long-term and residential care.
- Promote long-term and residential caregiving as meaningful and rewarding professions.
- Recognize and celebrate the work of caregivers.

For more information about *The Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis: A 2018 Report,* contact:

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Glossary

Assisted living: Adult family homes, community based residential facilities, residential care apartment complexes, and supportive living apartments

Caregivers: Registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants, persons with CBRF certification, resident assistants, and other direct and personal care workers

Direct care workers: Personal caregivers not including certified nursing assistants

Long-term and residential care providers: Includes assisted living plus nursing homes

Personal caregivers: Certified nursing assistants, persons with CBRF certification, resident assistants, and other direct and personal care workers

Footnotes

1 Disability Service Provider Network, LeadingAge Wisconsin, Wisconsin Health Care Association / Wisconsin Center for Assisted Living, Wisconsin Assisted Living Association, 2018 Workforce Survey
2 Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Quality Assurance, Office of Caregiver Quality, 2019
3 US Inflation Calculator, www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/current-inflation-rates
4 Family Care, Family Care Partnership, and Pace Enrollment Data, www.dis.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02370-19oct.pdf
5 LeadingAge Wisconsin, Residential Services Association of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Health Care Association/Wisconsin Center for Assisted Living, Wisconsin Assisted Living Association, 2016 Workforce Survey
6 Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Occupation Employment Projections, 2020
7 Department of Health Services, Office of Caregiver Quality
8 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2020
9 Wisconsin Center for Nursing: Wisconsin 2018 RN Workforce Survey
10 Wisconsin Center for Nursing: Wisconsin 2017 LPN Workforce Survey