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WISCONSIN PROVIDER SURVEY: WORKFORCE SHORTAGE REMAINS AT CRISIS LEVEL
Long-Term Care Workforce Report Shows That Wisconsin Must Address Caregiver Shortage

MADISON – Wisconsin nursing home and assisted living providers continue to endure a workforce shortage crisis, according to a new report produced by a coalition of provider associations including the Wisconsin Health Care Association/Wisconsin Center for Assisted Living, LeadingAge Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Assisted Living Association, and the Disability Service Provider Network.

[The Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis: A 2018 Report](#) is based on data collected through an unprecedented, in-depth statewide provider survey which showed that 1 in 5 direct caregiver positions in Wisconsin's nursing homes and assisted living facilities are currently vacant. That number has worsened since a 2016 report, which found that 1 in 7 LTC positions were unfilled. The 2018 provider survey found there are as many as 16,500 job openings in long-term care (LTC) facilities across the state (compared to 11,500 openings according to the 2016 survey).

The report also shows that LTC providers continue to struggle to offer competitive wages compared to other unskilled positions available at fast-food restaurants, big box stores, national gas station/convenience store chains, and other non-healthcare-related organizations.

The inability of LTC providers to offer competitive wages is due in large part to long-term care residents' reliance on Medicaid and Medicaid-waiver funding to pay their bills. For example, approximately 2/3 of nursing home residents in Wisconsin are Medicaid recipients. A recent state-by-state analysis of the nation's Medicaid nursing home reimbursement systems concluded Wisconsin has the worst system in the country, with the average Wisconsin facility losing \$63.04 per day for each of the approximately 21,100 Medicaid recipients residing in Wisconsin's nursing homes. Long-term care residents' heavy reliance on Medicaid, paired with an insufficient Medicaid reimbursement system, severely limits a nursing home's ability to compete in a tight labor market.

“As evidenced in the report, the long-term care workforce crisis is intensifying – and long-term care providers continue to be strained by the increasing number of caregiver vacancies and the lack of applicants for available jobs,” said John Sauer, President and CEO of LeadingAge Wisconsin. “Every one of us is getting older and likely to have aging parents, family, and friends who will encounter caregiving needs in the future. As this demand for long-term care services continues to grow, it will become increasingly difficult for our provider communities to meet the needs of our aging society. This workforce report is a clarion call to action. We collectively must advance strategies to address the workforce challenges of today so that persons can receive the quality of care and services they need and deserve.”

State leaders have taken notice of the long-term care workforce shortage and are taking steps to begin addressing the crisis. Governor Scott Walker signed the 2017-19 state budget, which included a 2 percent increase in skilled nursing Medicaid reimbursement in each year of the biennium and a \$60 million funding increase for Family Care. This week, the Department of Health Services will unveil the WisCaregiver Career Program, which provides free training for Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification and provides workplace incentives in an effort to attract 2,300 new CNAs to long-term care.

But the 2018 Long-Term Care Workforce Report demonstrates that more must be done to address funding deficiencies.

“Wisconsin’s long-term care providers are grateful to Governor Walker and the legislature for positive steps included in the state budget, and appreciate DHS’s leadership and innovation in creating a program to attract more caregivers to the long-term care profession through the WisCaregiver Career Program,” said John Vander Meer, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Health Care Association. “With the need for LTC services expected to continue to rise, providers are eager to work with state leaders to be a part of the solution to Wisconsin’s long-term care workforce crisis.”

The workforce crisis is forcing many providers to either limit admissions or rely on current caregivers to work double shifts or overtime, which can lead to caregiver burnout. Twenty-five percent of survey respondents reported they were unable to admit new residents or tenants due to the inability to fill caregiver job vacancies, up from 18 percent in the 2016 survey.

“This ever-growing workforce crisis is pushing more providers to decrease their admissions, making it more difficult for residents to have choice in where they live,” said Sarah Bass of the Wisconsin Assisted Living Association. “Current staff has had to work overtime regularly as well as take on an increase in workload, ultimately leading to worker burnout and turnover.”

The coalition plans to continue working closely with the Governor, the Department of Health Services, and the Legislature to continue working to address the long-term care workforce crisis.

“Long-term care providers are all too aware of this crisis because they live it each and every day,” said Lincoln Burr of the Disability Service Provider Network. “We find ourselves caught in a staffing vortex with dramatically increasing need and a rapidly constricting workforce. In an efficient and balanced marketplace, rates would be going up to compensate for the imbalance but instead provider rates have decreased in terms of both inflation adjusted and real dollars. This has led our care provider associations to form an unprecedented partnership and produce this report. We want to make sure that legislators, administration officials, and the public learn of the serious consequences that will result if we as a state fail to address the long-term care workforce crisis.”

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