



Who are the people impacted by this issue?

In 2019, Wisconsin employed 72,060 Direct-Care Workers. These workers are the backbone of Wisconsin's Long-Term Care system. Wisconsin's Direct Care workforce is essential to the health and independence of people with disabilities, the elderly and their families. A history of inadequate wages and lack of opportunities career growth has maintained an ongoing, statewide crisis.

It is projected in 2026 Wisconsin will need to employ 93,072 workers to provide this necessary care to children and adults with disabilities, and the elderly.

Why is this issue important?

These workers (personal care, home health) provide essential care to children and adults with disabilities, as well as, the elderly to ensure adequate supports to lead safe and healthy lives in their own homes. Consistent access to community-based direct care workers prevents unnecessary costly hospitalizations and deters admission to more expensive long-term care settings.

Direct Care workers provide necessary care that allows family caregivers to maintain their own employment, health and well-being, as well as, their contributing roles in their own communities.

How are supports for this issue funded?

Wisconsin's Long-term care workforce is funded through one of Wisconsin Medical Assistance Long-Term Care Programs. In Family Care, Managed Care Organizations receive a monthly capitated payment from the Department of Health Services and in IRIS (Include, Respect, I Self-Direct) individuals direct their long-term care supports through a monthly budget allocation. Eligible children connected to the Children's Long-Term Support Waiver receive funds via a county based case management system. Some personal care services are also funded directly using the individuals Medicaid card.

What are major concerns related to this issue?

Wisconsin providers and consumers are reporting great difficulty in recruiting and retaining quality direct care workers. A 2018 survey of long-term care providers found that: more than 50% of providers indicated they were unable to compete with other employers; 54% had no applicants for vacant caregiver positions; 83% indicated that there were no qualified applicants for caregiver openings; and 25% denied admissions to their facilities due to the lack of caregivers.

A recent Survival Coalition survey revealed that 85% of long-term care recipients don't have enough workers to work all of their shifts. 60% also report that they get sick more often when they don't have enough workers.

The inability to attract and retain direct care workers has resulted in many long-term care recipients going without essential care compromising their health, safety, and their ability to live in the community.

Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development reports the need for personal care and home health aides continues to increase by almost 30% per year. The fastest growing occupation in Wisconsin.



WORKFORCE

How has this issue been impacted by the COVID pandemic?

Wisconsin's Direct Care Workforce shortage was amplified during the COVID due to multiple factors. A statewide Survival Coalition survey of more than 500 disability and older adult service providers shows nearly 20% of these small businesses fear they are not financially sustainable as a result of COVID-19.

The loss of any portion of these providers will only amplify the provider shortages that already exist and result in people not getting needed supports and services that keep them healthy and able to stay in their homes.

Home and community-based providers were not recognized as essential workers. This led to lack of PPE for workers, increased costs to providers to support hazard pay or additional training, as well as, retention issues due to higher payments from unemployment than hourly pay rates.

