

Declaring 2018 The Year of the Caregiver

Wisconsin continues to lead the nation in our system of supports for older adults, people with disabilities and their family members. In 2018 Wisconsin will be the first state in the nation to end waiting lists for long-term services and supports for adults and children who meet an institutional level of care. In addition, our state-of-the-art Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) system offers a one-stop connection to supports in every county that keep people living in their own homes and communities and reduce or delay the need for publicly funded long-term care.

Yet Wisconsin is reaching a tipping point. Families who are the backbone of Wisconsin's CareForce - providing an estimated 538 million hours of unpaid care to adults with disabilities and older adults- are under pressure to meet increasing need. As baby boomers age out of their peak caregiving years many are also entering a time when they themselves may need caregiving support. Providers are struggling to attract and retain direct care workers, putting people at risk for going without necessary care. More than 85% of Wisconsinites who rely on direct care workers for some or all their support needs cannot find help.

Wisconsin needs a strategic plan to recognize and support the "CareForce" of the future.

2018 is the year Wisconsin can step up and lead the nation once again in recognizing and supporting the contribution of caregivers to both their family members and the state economy.

Recognizing Past Commitments to Caregivers:

Over the last two years Governor Walker and the Administration, with the support of the Legislature, have made significant investments in supporting caregivers and families that can be highlighted and expanded upon in 2018.

- Wisconsin was recently recognized as a national leader in long-term care as Governor Walker accepted the SCAN Foundation's Pacesetter Prize for innovation.
- The Wisconsin Department of Health Services' investment in Dementia-Friendly Communities continues to support families dealing with this epidemic.
- The Governor's directive to expand Family Care and IRIS long-term care programs statewide is ensuring that people with disabilities and older adults do not have to wait for essential supports, relieving pressure on families.
- The biennial budget investment in rate increases for the direct care workforce in community-based personal care and nursing homes is helping to retain workers.
- The end to a years-long waiting list for more than 2000 children with significant disabilities continues to be celebrated by families as they finally get the supports they need.
- The State's Dementia-Friendly Employers Toolkit is a first-of-its kind recognition of the caregiving costs to employers as an increasing number of employees balance career responsibilities with the challenges of caring for a loved one.

We believe the State Legislature, with a call to action by the Governor in 2018, is poised to do more. Building on the significant work of the Speaker's Task Force on Alzheimer's and Dementia in 2015, bi-partisan legislators are already taking on new initiatives that can be part of a Year of the Caregiver Campaign in 2018.

Bi-Partisan Activities in the Legislature Currently Include:

- A Caregiver Tax Credit proposal that would offer a \$1,000 credit to a family member providing care to a loved one.
- Supported Decision-Making legislation that ensures older adults and people with disabilities can keep their dignity and stay independent with supports for key life decisions for as long as possible.
- Changes in Guardianship laws that ensure a caregiver can help their family member across state lines.

More can be done.

We suggest that by declaring 2018 as The Year of the Caregiver Governor Walker can:

- **Convene a Summit to Support Wisconsin's CareForce of the Future**

By bringing together thought leaders in the direct care workforce, employers and families and advocates in the disability and aging communities, Wisconsin can develop 21st century solutions that:

- Meet the needs of employers who are under pressure to retain skilled workers who are also balancing caregiving needs.
- Elevate the contributions of the paid direct care workforce to Wisconsin's economy.
- Create awareness about and improve navigation of Wisconsin's resource rich system that is available to support caregivers.
- Change the conversation about caregiving so people are not afraid to ask for and accept help when they need it.
- Ensure that caregivers can stay in the workforce and people with disabilities and older adults who need care can stay in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

This proposal has the support of the following organizations:

AARP Wisconsin
Aging & Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin
Alzheimer's Association, Southeastern Wisconsin
ARC La Crosse, Inc.
CAL Care, Inc. dba Right at Home Kenosha-Racine
Community Living Alliance
Disability Rights Wisconsin
Easterseals Southeast Wisconsin
Employment Resources, Inc. (ERI)
ERAs Senior Network, Inc. and the Caregiver Connection of Waukesha County
Family Voices of Wisconsin
Greater WI Agency on Aging Resources, Inc.

Lincoln County ARC
Living Our Visions
Milwaukee Center For Independence
Options for Independent Living
Respite Care Association of Wisconsin
Richland County Arc
Save IRIS
Society's Assets, Inc
The Arc Eau Claire, Inc.
The Arc Fond du Lac
The Arc of Dunn County, Inc.
The Arc of Racine County
The Arc Wisconsin
Waupaca County ARC Inc.
WI Personal Services Association
Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities
Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers
Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance