

## DRW Comments on Governor's Task Force on Caregiving Proposals

July 7, 2020

DRW commends the hard work the members of the Governor's Taskforce on Caregiving have engaged in to address the critical shortage of direct-care workers in Wisconsin. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on the proposals issued by the Task Force.

DRW endorses the Survival Coalition recommendations and adopts them as our own. Those recommendations include full endorsement of the following Task Force proposals. We have listed these endorsements in our order of priority:

1. **Expanding BadgerCare**
2. **Earnings Disregard**
3. **Direct Care Worker Fund**
4. **Medicaid Loss Ratio**
5. **Wisconsin Credit for Caring**
6. **Family Medical Leave Act**
7. **Rate Bands Proposal (as expanded upon in the Survival Coalition recommendation)**
8. **Caregiver Assessment: TCare (Family Caregiver Assessment)**
9. **ADRC Reinvestment**
10. **Background Check Policies**
11. **The Care Act**
12. **Home Care Provider Registry (as expanded upon in the Survival Coalition recommendations)**

We strongly recommend that at least the top seven proposals move forward.

**Expanding BadgerCare (Medicaid)** warrants a separate statement of support. Wisconsin is now one of only thirteen states that has failed to avail itself of the opportunity to expand health insurance coverage to those at or below 138% of the federal poverty level. Wisconsin has left over a billion dollars of health care funding on the table over the past ten years. Given the fiscal body blow the state is about to take due to the COVID-19 outbreak, it is absolutely critical that the legislature embrace Medicaid expansion as a health and fiscal imperative.

Expanding Medicaid access will benefit many caregivers and can materially help to address the caregiver crisis. Lack of benefits, including health insurance, is a major factor contributing to direct care professionals leaving the work force.

Access to Medicaid has increased in importance due to COVID-19. With the rising rate of unemployment, many Wisconsinites have lost access to employer provided health insurance and are enrolling in Medicaid. Access to health care is especially important during a pandemic. Had

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we expanded Medicaid in the last budget, Wisconsin would have provided healthcare coverage to an additional 80,000 people, including many with disabilities. The additional funding Medicaid expansion will inject into the Medicaid budget will help us pay for things we are going to have to be doing anyway. The only question is, will we do the fiscally responsible thing and take this additional unencumbered funding to help accomplish them? Or will we place an added burden on the taxpayers of this state, who have already been contributing to, but losing out on the benefit of, Medicaid Expansion?

We share Survival's concerns regarding the breadth of the **Nursing Home and Personal Care Payment Reform** proposal and its focus on institutional care. The proposal needs to explicitly cover all direct care workers providing HCBS services, including Home Health Aides, Nursing Aides, Orderlies, Attendants, Therapy Aides, Job Coaches, Peer Mentors and Respite Workers. The desire and ability for people to remain in their homes and in their community should not be undermined by disproportionate investment in institutional settings which may create greater instability and crisis in the HCBS workforce. Workers in HCBS settings must be treated equally and supported.

We also share Survival's concerns regarding the proposal related to **Regulation and Compliance Changes**. However, inconsistent review of provider submissions and uneven enforcement of sanctions, particularly when imposed on small, locally based providers, have an impact on the caregiver shortage. Providers that leave Medicaid or go out of business altogether contribute to the lack of caregivers available to people with disabilities in the community. We have seen this in the therapeutic arts and in the area of private duty nursing. Regulation and oversight are a critical component of quality care. But the Division of Medicaid Services, particularly the Office of the Inspector General, needs to be responsible and fair as it engages in its oversight function. Minor paperwork errors do not warrant fiscal cataclysm.

Like Survival we note the **absence of proposals relating to other employment benefits** beyond health benefits. While the importance of health coverage cannot be overstated, additional benefits of employment must also be considered if direct care is to become an attractive and competitive employment option. We endorse the additional employment benefits identified by Survival and urge the Task Force to commence work on a comprehensive proposal to make those a reality for this workforce.

The need for caregivers is growing due to Wisconsin's aging population. The percentage of people age 85 and older is expected to increase 112 percent in the next 20 years. Wisconsin must act now to address the critical shortage of direct care workers, and to advance policies that will attract and retain these essential workers.

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