

*For immediate release – 5/23/24*

### **Statement on Federal Nursing Home Staffing Mandate**

Sufficient dedicated caregivers are undoubtedly the backbone of high-quality skilled nursing facility services. LeadingAge Wisconsin providers have long recognized the inspirational work of front-line caregivers, and sought increased recognition and higher reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid programs to improve pay and working conditions.

Unfortunately, CMS's recent final rule fails to improve their situation when it dedicates no additional provider reimbursement and insufficient workforce training dollars in conjunction with a one-size-fits all mandate. Even providers who currently staff above these levels are regularly faced with negative rhetoric and punitive regulations when they are doing such difficult work serving our state's most vulnerable adults with limited resources.

Unfunded mandates will only exacerbate the longstanding workforce shortages facing the long-term care provider community and make it harder for families to find quality care close to home. The aging demographics of Wisconsin already make access to quality care for elders a challenging endeavor, and the devastating consequences of this rule will mean additional providers will close and seniors and their families will face even more hurdles to getting the services they need.

Beyond direct caregivers clocking minutes, older adults also need nutritious/appetizing meals, well maintained facilities, grounds that are kept up, spiritual support, socialization/engagement, community culture, and trained leadership. Unfunded mandates on one aspect of operations will only draw away from others and detract from work being done by providers in these areas across the state.

LeadingAge Wisconsin is committed to continue to work with legislators, regulators, policy makers, and consumer advocates to grow the long-term care workforce by respecting the extremely difficult work that they do and finding innovative solutions, including technology, to make their jobs easier and provide higher quality care with fewer available staff.

Solutions like the WisCaregiver Career program, providing free training and bonuses to individuals who become Certified Nursing Assistants, and ongoing partnerships with WisCAP and refugee settlement agencies to train new direct caregivers are some of the laudable efforts that have come from this work.

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