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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
John Vander Meer – WHCA/WiCAL/608-257-0125
John Sauer – LeadingAge Wisconsin/608-255-7060
Sarah Bass – Wisconsin Assisted Living Association/608-288-0246
Dan Drury – RSA Wisconsin/414-332-8979

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

MADISON – Wisconsin nursing home and assisted living providers are facing 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 Residential Services Association of Wisconsin.

The Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis: A 2016 Report is based on data collected through an unprecedented, in-depth statewide member survey which showed that 1 in 7 direct caregiver positions in Wisconsin's nursing homes and assisted living facilities are currently vacant. The survey found there are as many as 11,500 job openings in long-term care (LTC) facilities across the state.

[See the report here.](#)

The report shows that LTC providers are struggling 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 their heavy reliance on Medicaid and Medicaid-waiver funding. The nursing home situation depicts perfectly the dilemma LTC providers currently face: while 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 \$55.89 per day for each of the approximately 16,490 Medicaid recipients residing in a state nursing home. This combination of heavy reliance on the Medicaid program and the insufficient funding of that program severely limits a nursing home's ability to compete in a tight labor market.

“While demand continues to grow for long-term care services, Wisconsin's care providers are hamstrung in the marketplace by their heavy reliance on insufficient Medicaid and Medicaid-waiver funding,” said John Sauer, President/CEO of LeadingAge Wisconsin. “Long-term care providers are committed to offering the best care possible to our state's frail elderly and disabled residents, but that requires sufficient staffing, a requirement made that much more difficult to achieve because of the increasing challenges to compete for needed staff.”

In addition, the report shows that a significant percentage of the long-term care workforce relies on public assistance programs like BadgerCare.

“All long-term care providers agree that offering higher wages for direct caregivers not only will help fill thousands of available jobs, but also will help our workers achieve greater independence from state assistance programs, a continued goal of Gov. Walker and the Legislature,” said John Vander Meer, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Health Care Association. “But what does it say about our priorities -

that we pay many of those who care for our loved ones a wage sufficiently low as to make them eligible for public assistance funding?”

The workforce shortage 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. The survey found that 18 percent of respondents reported they were unable to admit new residents or tenants due to the inability to fill job vacancies.

“The workforce crisis has forced providers to rely on existing staff to take on a more burdensome workload in order to meet the demands of our residents and tenants,” said Sarah Bass of the Wisconsin Assisted Living Association. “Make no mistake: LTC providers are facing not only a recruitment issue but a retention issue as well. When providers can’t compete, they are forced to rely even more heavily on current staff, with the end result too often being worker fatigue and the search for a new workplace.”

The coalition plans to work closely with Gov. Walker’s Administration and the Legislature to ensure the next state budget addresses the workforce crisis.

“Long-term care providers are all too aware of this crisis because they live it each and every day,” said Dan Drury, Board President of Residential Services Association of Wisconsin. “Care provider associations have formed an unprecedented partnership and produced this report 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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