



Long-Term Care Workforce Crisis Worsens, Democrats Have a Plan to Fill Shortage

Who will take care of you or your loved ones when you need help in your home or when you enter a nursing home? Sadly, Wisconsin faces a long-term care crisis, leaving an aging population to wonder if the care they need will be available and leaving families to worry about the quality of care their loved ones receive.

Last week, a [new report](#) showed that the long-term care workforce shortage is even worse than expected. Over the last 15 years, older adults and community members with disabilities who need long-term care at home or in a residential care facility has increased 23% without signs of slowing down. While the need for care increases, long-term care providers struggle to fill the 16,500 vacant positions statewide.

Inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates make it impossible for care providers to set competitive wages for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) who are on the front lines caring for our most vulnerable friends and family members. The median starting wage for personal caregivers in Wisconsin is just \$10.75 per hour despite often grueling workloads on top of the training and skills these caregivers need to provide a quality level of care to their patients. This starting wage is \$1.25 less than the median wage paid by non-health care employers for unskilled, entry-level workers in retail, fast food, and other fields. The rate at which CNAs leave the profession continues to increase as they flee the industry for jobs with higher wages and better benefits. The increasing need for long-term care services and the struggle to fill CNA positions has reached crisis proportions.

Instead of addressing this crisis head-on by tackling the issues of wages and benefits to attract and retain caregivers without diminishing quality, Republicans in the State Assembly passed a bill (AB 432) that would have diminished quality of care by reducing the required hours of training CNAs must complete before caring for their patients. The Republican race to the bottom approach not only fails to address the cause of the workforce shortage, but it puts the quality of care for Wisconsin's most vulnerable residents at risk.

While AB 432 was stopped in the Senate and did not become law, it is clear that we need to do more to address this growing concern. That is why we introduced the CNA Pay Act (AB 755, 756, and 757), which would have increased wages and expanded access to training for Certified Nursing Assistants and other personal care workers. Our plan would have utilized Medicaid expansion funds from the federal government to adequately increase reimbursement rates and would have tied these increases directly to wages for front-line caregivers. Our plan would have also provided grants to technical colleges to expand CNA training programs in underserved areas where training is limited or unavailable and would have enabled CNAs who train and work in Wisconsin to recoup tuition costs through a tax credit. Unfortunately, Republicans in control of the Legislature refused to even hold a public hearing on our proposal.

With more than 16,000 vacant personal care worker positions and demand for CNAs in Wisconsin projected to grow exponentially, the state has to take meaningful action to address the long-term care crisis. As this legislative session comes to a close, Democrats remain committed to supporting our nursing assistants and other personal care workers to ensure that qualified caregivers are there for you and your loved ones when you need them.