

Dear Governor Evers,

On behalf of the Milwaukee County Commission on Aging (the Commission), we are writing in support of the recommendations resulting from the Governor's Task Force on the Healthcare Work Force. The Commission represents more than 186,000 older adults, many of whom are deeply reliant on healthcare workers to complete daily living activities, accomplish critical health tasks, and support their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

We are supportive of the Task Force's goals to identify ways to improve patient care and alleviate burdens on the healthcare work force, explore education and training opportunities for those interested in healthcare careers, and to study issues related to recruitment and retention in this workforce. Of the 10 recommendations and 26 action items, we wanted to highlight several we were most supportive of and encourage their inclusion in the 2025-2027 Biennial Budget:

- Reduce barriers to training by training direct care professional and nurse aides through WisCaregiver Careers, reduce GED/HSED costs for students, and increase training grants for allied health professionals and clinicians.
 - We understand that the increased educational requirements that healthcare careers require can be a burden to students, those interested in changing careers, or those looking to advance in the field. Offering state-sponsored training opportunities and grants to attend trainings helps ensure that there are more training opportunities for more people.
- Expand apprenticeships and other learning opportunities by providing additional state funding for apprenticeship programs, funding Worker Advancement Initiative Grants, and increasing student access to health science and student enrollment.
 - Providing access to education for healthcare careers, including funding for those educational programs, is key to ensuring that more students are entering the professions. Ensuring that there are continuing education opportunities for mid- and late-career professionals will enable retention in these fields.
- Increase payer support for recruitment and retention by expanding Medicaid to support healthcare workers and fund workforce initiatives, increasing rates to strengthen the workforce for those receiving care through publicly funded long-term care programs and for those in the behavioral health workforce.
 - Increasing reimbursement rates to those providing care to those in Medicaid's long-term care programs is critical to improving the level of care that our older adults and individuals with disabilities receive. Setting reasonable rates for these services ensures that there are enough eligible providers in the network, encouraging competition and choice for participants.
- Strengthen workforce monitoring and support by collecting and analyzing data on workforce participation to address recruitment and retention strategies and disseminate benefits to healthcare workers to encourage continued practice and remain competitive with other areas.
 - Understanding the landscape of the current healthcare work force will help determine strategies to increase recruitment and retention across the state. It is also crucial to know why healthcare professionals choose not to continue practicing or renewing their license and if there are strategies that can be implemented to encourage practitioners to renew.

Although we support all of the recommendations provided by the Task Force, we chose to highlight these key provisions because we believe they could have the most direct impact and benefit for the older adults that we represent in Milwaukee County.

We also want to note that providing the highest quality of care is one of our primary concerns as we address the healthcare work force. Older adults require and deserve care that protects their dignity and, if possible, allows them to age in place. As potential changes to training, licensure, and other facility requirements are contemplated, we urge you to consider the different levels and types of care an individual may need and receive over the course of their lifespan and that qualified, nursing care is not eradicated in order to onboard more healthcare professionals at a quicker pace. For example, many conflate home health aides with paid caregivers when, in reality, home health aides are not qualified to do the same level or standard of care that caregivers are expected to. There is a clear delineation between home health aides, certified nursing assistants, licensed practical nurses, and other health professionals. We support providing greater access to training by providing grants for educational costs and encouraging individuals to consider healthcare careers, but not that educational requirements for these individual careers be lessened.

As we anticipate the introduction of the 2025-2027 Biennial Budget, we are hopeful that many of these recommendations from the Task Force are present. We look forward to seeing the work of this group put into action.

Please reach out with any follow-up.

Sincerely,

Janice Wilberg, Ph.D.
Chair, Commission on Aging

Brian Peters
Legislative Officer, Commission on Aging