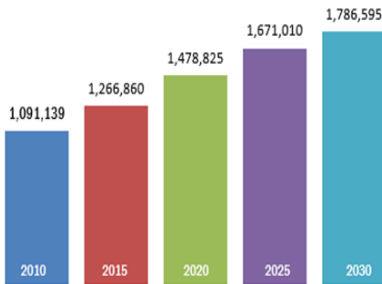


# Key Issues for Wisconsin Aging Advocates

Wisconsin Population 60 and Older



All links available at <https://gwaar.org/aging-advocacy-online-2021-references>

## 2021-2023 State Budget

Funding in the Wisconsin 2021-2023 Biennial Budget will significantly impact older adults and caregivers. Community based, targeted intervention strategies are needed to address the increase in loneliness, disparities in health and long-term care, and economic security concerns that have long challenged many older adults. Investing in programs and services that support older adults to remain living at home, active in their communities, and contributing to the economy is good for the state budget and good for older adults, their families, and our communities.

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network (WAAN) advocates the following positions on key investments that support older adults to improve their health and well-being, live with maximum independence and dignity, and reduce health and long-term care costs.



### 1. Reinvest in Wisconsin's Aging and Disability Resource Centers

**(ADRCs)** - Increase funding to ADRCs to equalize historical funding disparities and fully fund required contracted services. See [WAAN's ADRC Reinvestment Issue Brief](#) and [Wisconsin Counties Association ADRC Reinvestment](#).

ADRCs across the state receive different levels of funding based on when they began, which established foundational funding inequities. The base allocation for ADRCs has not increased since 2006. Since then, the population of older adults and people with disabilities has grown, as has the number of recommended services included in the ADRCs' state contract. Underfunded ADRCs do not have the resources to provide these critical services/programs to their growing number of customers. **We request:**

- a) **An investment of \$27.4 million to fully fund the current ADRC base contract requirements (mandated and recommended services), and**
- b) **An additional \$25 million to provide additional funding to expand/equalize critical ADRC services across the state, including:**
  - ◆ **Fully Fund Elder Benefit Specialists Statewide:** \$2,300,000 (no funding increase since 1997) - See [WAAN's Elder Benefit Specialist Issue Brief](#).
  - ◆ **Expand Dementia Care Specialist (DCS) Services statewide:** \$3,320,000
  - ◆ **Expand Caregiver Support and Programs:** \$3,600,000
  - ◆ **Expand Health Promotion Services:** \$6,000,000

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- ◆ **Expand Care Transition Services:** \$6,000,000
- ◆ **Fund Aging and Disability Resources in Tribes** (Including seven full-time Dementia Care Specialists and additional Disability Benefit Specialist and Aging & Disability Resource Specialists): \$1,740,000
- ◆ **Fully Fund Aging and Disability Resource Support Systems:** \$2,650,000



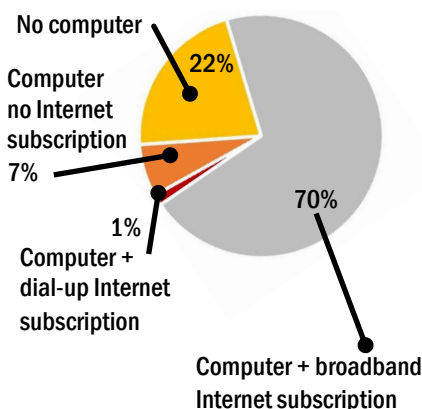
## 2. Caregiver Support

The work of family caregivers enables our older family members and friends to stay at home where costs are lowest and they want to live. Nearly 600,000 Wisconsinites family caregivers provide approximately \$7 billion in unpaid care, a cost our health and long-term care systems cannot afford to cover. The need to support the work of family caregivers is increasingly critical. **We request:**

- a) **Support for the Caregiver Tax Credit** - to provide much-needed financial relief (up to \$500 annually) for unpaid family caregivers spending an average of \$7,000 per year on out-of-pocket costs related to caregiving,
- b) **A \$500,000 annual increase in the Alzheimer’s and Family Caregiver Support Program (AFCSP) and an increase in the qualifying maximum household income from \$48,000 to \$55,000** - to increase support for low- and middle-income families throughout the state assisting a family member living with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia, and
- c) **Expansion of the Wisconsin Family Medical Leave Act** - to support the one in four workers over age 25 who are family caregivers and who attend to the *acute and chronic* care needs of their family members including *grandparents, grandchildren, and siblings*.

See the final [report](#) of the Governor’s Task Force on Caregiving for additional caregiver and direct care workforce rates, benefits, and untapped workers proposals supported by WAAN.

## Household Computer Connectivity: Wisconsinites 65 and Over



## 3. Infrastructure Expansion

- a) **High-Speed Internet Expansion** - Older adults are one of the largest demographics without access to broadband service. In Wisconsin, 30% of individuals age 65 and older don’t have either a computer or a computer with internet access. **We request reliable, affordable high-speed internet access for older adults and their families no matter where they live to ensure the connectivity critical to meet health, education, social, and economic needs.** See [WAAN’s High-Speed Internet Issue Brief](#).

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b) **Housing Support** - One of the most difficult challenges older adults face is finding housing that meets their needs as they age. Older adults overwhelmingly want to remain in their homes and communities, but major barriers persist, such as unaffordability, inaccessibility, discrimination, and the lack of appropriate options. Aging in place leads to better health outcomes, life satisfaction, and social engagement. In order to preserve the independence of older adults, we must ensure more affordable and accessible housing for both renters and owners. To address these needs, **we request:**

- ◆ **Index the parameters of the Homestead Tax Credit** for inflation to preserve the credit's value and increase the maximum income threshold to \$30,000.
- ◆ **Increase the qualifying income limit for the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) property tax deferral loan program** that provides loans to qualifying older adult homeowners to help pay for property taxes.
- ◆ **Establish a \$1,000,000 forgivable matching loan fund for low-income older homeowners** to add assistive technology, home energy conservation measures, or accessibility modifications.
- ◆ **Provide \$500,000 for the establishment of regional tenant resource centers with housing navigators** to provide support to property owners and tenants by addressing housing responsibilities, reducing conflict, avoiding unnecessary evictions, and to connect older adults with housing options that meet their needs.
- ◆ **Match 50% of federal low-income tax credits with state housing development tax credits and require WHEDA to allocate a dedicated percentage of tax credits be set-aside for older adult housing in its Qualified Action Plan.** See [WAAN's Housing Issue Brief](#).

c) **Transportation Support** - Reliable, accessible and affordable transportation is a frequent concern of older adults across the state. Transportation programs are vital to support the health, well-being, financial security, independence, and community engagement of Wisconsinites who do not drive. Wisconsin's progress advancing home and community-based care, ending isolation, improving health and nutrition, and promoting employment across the lifespan is limited without access to transportation that meets the needs and recognizes the choices of its citizens. **We request:**

- ◆ **A 20% increase (\$183,000) in capital and operation assistance for specialized transportation (s.85.22)** to assist with operations, replacement or acquisition of new transit vehicles and expand mobility management services needed to meet our needs as we age.

# Key Issues for Wisconsin Aging Advocates

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- ◆ **Inflationary increases for mass transit assistance and specialized transportation assistance for counties and tribes** (s.85.20, s.85.21, and s.85.215 respectively) to ensure we can maintain our existing system while setting the stage for increased funding and capacity in the future.
- ◆ **Statutory authority allowing local units of government the ability to raise revenue for transportation needs.**

See [WAAN's Transportation Issue Brief](#).



## 4. Lowering Healthcare Costs

a) **Falls Prevention** - Wisconsin has the nation's highest rate of deadly falls among older adults and the problem is worsening. The rate of deaths from falls among people 65 and older in Wisconsin rose 19.1% from 2016 to 2019, while the nationwide rate increased 7.6% over the same time period. In 2019, 1,675 older adults died from falls. In Wisconsin the medical costs of falls are extremely high: the yearly cost of falls in Wisconsin is nearly \$800 million, including approximately \$137 million in Medicaid expenses and \$147 million in out-of-pocket expenses. To save lives and reduce costs, **we request a \$500,000 annual budget appropriation to reduce Wisconsin's high rate of deadly falls through a statewide support center and proven, locally delivered prevention programs.** See [WAAN's Falls Prevention Issue Brief](#).



b) **Prescription Drug Costs** - The high cost of prescription drugs force some people to cut back on other essential household expenses and others to ration their medication, potentially risking their health. To ensure all older adults can access the medication they need at a reasonable cost, **we request support for the following proposals:**

- ◆ **Establish a \$50 copay cap on insulin and create an Insulin Safety Net Program** to ensure people do not need to choose between rationing insulin and meeting other basic needs.
- ◆ **Establish a Prescription Drug Importation Program to import generic, off-brand drugs from abroad.**
- ◆ **Create transparency requirements for drug companies and pharmacy benefit managers** to stop prescription drug price gouging and consumer exploitation, and implement other proposals included in the Governor's Task Force on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices final [report](#) that reduce prescription drug costs for consumers, as well as those that improve drug price transparency.