



2021-2023 Policy and Budget Priorities – February 2021

The **Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network** is a collaborative group of individuals and associations working with and for Wisconsin's older adults to shape public policy to improve their quality of life.

Core member organizations:

Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (*ADPAW*)

Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter

Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (*WADSA*)

Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (*WAA*)

Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (*WABS*)

Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (*WAND*)

Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (*WASC*)

Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (*WIHA*)

Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (*WISCA*)

Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

Older adults are at disproportionate risk of severe infection and mortality from COVID-19. Age and ageism have been significant risk factors during this pandemic, increasing the physical, psychosocial, relationship, and economic burden on older adults. The pandemic has made older adults more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness which can result in significant negative consequences to health and well-being. Recovery for many of those who were critically ill and hospitalized is expected to take months or even years. Community based, targeted intervention strategies will be needed to address the exacerbation of loneliness, disparities in health and long-term care, and economic security concerns that have long challenged many older adults.

Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) Reinvestment - [WCA ADRC Reinvestment](#)

Pre-, during, and assuredly post-pandemic older adults, people with disabilities, and their families and caregivers turn to ADRC's as the place to go to get accurate, unbiased information on all aspects of life related to aging or living with a disability. To develop a more reliable, accurate, equitable, and flexible funding formula for ADRCs (last increased in 2006) **WAAN's Position: Provide an additional \$27.4 million GPR investment to fully fund the current contract requirements (mandated and recommended services), and**

Provide approximately \$25 million to provide additional funding to expand/equalize ADRC services across the state:

- Fully Fund Elder Benefit Specialists Statewide: \$2,300,000 ¹
- Expand Dementia Care Specialist (DCS) Funding Statewide: \$3,320,000 ²
- Expand Caregiver Support and Programs: \$3,600,000 ³
- Expand Health Promotion Services: \$6,000,000
- Expand Care Transition Services: \$6,000,000
- Fund Aging and Disability Resources in Tribes (Includes 7.0 DCS [\$560,000], plus Disability Benefit Specialist, and Aging & Disability Resource Specialist positions: \$1,180,000)
- Fully Fund Aging and Disability Resource Support Systems: \$2,650,000

^{1, 2, 3} These proposals are also listed separately in WAAN's Budget and Policy Priorities document.

Direct Care Workforce Support

To strengthen the workforce to ensure sufficient quality staff to meet our long-term care needs

WAAN's Position: Support the ten direct care workforce rates, benefits, and untapped workers proposals included in the final [report](#) of the Governor's Task Force on Caregiving.

Elder Benefit Specialist Program Support¹ - [Issue Brief](#)

To ensure access to benefits counseling and legal advocacy services for Wisconsin's fastest growing population

WAAN's Position: Revise Wis. Stat. 46.81 to increase state funding for the Elder Benefit Specialist (EBS) program from \$2,298,400 (since 1997) to \$4,596,800 to account for the significant increase in the population served by the program, increasing demand for EBS services, and increasing complexities associated with access to essential benefit programs.

Family Caregiver Support

To sustain family caregivers as the backbone of our health and long-term care systems

WAAN's Position: Support expansion of dementia care specialist services² to the remaining unserved counties/tribes, as well as the family caregiver and home care registry recommendations included in the final [report](#) of the Governor's Task Force on Caregiving:

- Caregiver Assessment: Tailored Caregiver Assessment and Referral Proposal
- Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC): Reinvestment/Caregiver Support³

Contact WAAN

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- Family Medical Leave Act Amendments
- The Wisconsin Credit for Caring Act
- The Care Act
- Home Care Provider Registry Pilot

Healthy Aging Through Reducing Falls – [Issue Brief](#)

To save lives and reduce costs

WAAN’s Position: Provide 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. 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.

High-Speed Internet Expansion

To provide critical connections for older adults to meet health, education, social, and economic needs

WAAN’s Position: Provide reliable, affordable high-speed internet access to older adults and their families no matter where they live. According to the Federal Communications Commission over 25% of rural residents lack access to 25 Mbps connections, the speed which is now considered the standard (*telehealth/telemedicine services may require higher speeds).

Housing Support – [Issue Brief](#)

To preserve older adults’ quality of life and financial security and help them age in their homes and communities

WAAN’s Position:

For Older Homeowners

- Increase the qualifying income limit for the 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.

For Older Renters

- 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, and avoiding unnecessary evictions, and to connect older adults with housing options that meet their needs.
- Establish a no-interest loan program for landlords making safety and accessibility improvements to affordable rental units with older adult tenants.

For Older Adults Who Are Homeless or Seeking More Affordable Housing

- Match 50% of federal low-income tax credits with state housing development tax credits and require the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority to allocate a dedicated percentage of tax credits to be set-aside for older adult housing in its Qualified Action Plan (\$4,000,000 per annum).
- Require DHS to apply for a demonstration waiver that allows the use of Medicaid funds for intensive case management services to assist MA recipients to obtain permanent housing.

Prescription Drug Cost Affordability/SeniorCare

To ensure all older adults can access the medication they need at a reasonable cost

WAAN Position: Expand the SeniorCare Prescription Drug Assistance Program to include vaccinations and support 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. According to the WI Poverty Report (2019), public policies designed to increase the coverage of medical expenses for the low-income elderly can do more to help to alleviate the economic hardship felt by this group than almost any other public policy.

Transportation Support - [Issue Brief](#)

To support the health, well-being, financial security, and community engagement of older Wisconsinites

WAAN’s Position:

- **Increase funding for public transit and specialized transportation**
 - Provide a 20% increase in s.85.22 (capital assistance program for specialized transportation) to assist with replacement or acquisition of new transit vehicles and expand mobility management services. Funding for s.85.22 has not increased since the 2000-2001 budget.
 - Provide inflationary increases for s.85.20 (mass transit operating assistance), s.85.21 (specialized transportation assistance for counties), and s.85.215 (tribal elderly transportation) to ensure we can maintain our existing system while setting the stage for increased funding and capacity in the future.
- **Increase coordination of transportation resources**
 - Develop statutory language that incentivizes cities, towns, villages, and counties to create regional transportation networks.
 - Form an Interdepartmental Coordination Council and Advisory Committee.
- **Remove barriers for volunteer driver programs**
 - Enact legislation prohibiting insurers from creating unnecessary barriers to maintaining personal vehicle insurance for volunteer drivers.
 - Include protections for volunteer driving under the Good Samaritan law.
- **Support statutory authority that would provide local units of government, individually or collaboratively, the ability to raise revenue for transit, infrastructure, and other transportation needs.**

Voter Support - [Issue Brief](#)

To support safe, accessible, and inclusive elections for older Wisconsin voters

WAAN’s Position: Support [recommendations](#) to the voting process to improve voter registration, absentee voting, in-person voting at the polls, and voting in residential care facilities.

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