

# Wisconsin's Working Caregivers

## STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS



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### A Message to Employers

Are you struggling to hire or retain workers? Do you know how many of your employees have family caregiving responsibilities in addition to traditional child rearing?

It may surprise you to learn that one in four working-age adults provides care or financial assistance to an older family member, an adult child or other loved one with a disability, or a spouse with a long-term illness. This means that at least one quarter of potential hires and of staff you currently employ are engaged in a balancing act between home and office. Attracting and retaining workers today requires strategies that stand out from competitors.

One relatively easy and low-cost way to grab a job seeker's attention is to be an employer that understands and supports working caregivers. The benefits to your company will be increased company loyalty, improved individual performance, and higher staff retention.

We learned that a few small changes can transform businesses into a place where employees will want to build a long career.

**To survey your own workforce**, visit the *Employed Caregiver Survey* page of the UW-Madison Division of Extension website and click *How To Host a Survey*. You can find this resource at:

<https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/agingfriendlycommunities/employed-caregiver-survey/>

From June through October of 2021, the Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance (WFACSA) and UW-Madison Division of Extension asked employers and working caregivers to tell us how Wisconsin businesses and families are being affected by family caregiving responsibilities. A total of 564 individuals responded, of which 447 (79.4%) had a family caregiving role.



More than **8 in 10** caregivers reported having their work life interrupted

# Wisconsin Employer and Family Caregiver Survey

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## Introduction

We asked employers and working caregivers to tell us how Wisconsin businesses and families are being affected by family caregiving responsibilities. We defined family caregiving as care provided to any older adult, or a child or an adult of any age with a disability who requires routine care beyond what is considered conventional child rearing.

We already knew that one in four working-age adults regularly provides care to a family member or friend. What we didn't know is how well Wisconsin family caregivers and the businesses that employ them have been balancing daily challenges. We also wanted to know what resources both groups want or need that are not currently available at the state, county, or community level.

Most working caregivers told us they felt they could continue meeting their work and home responsibilities for longer with just a little more help. They report very low use of FMLA, although using paid leave, reducing work hours, or changing jobs to accommodate caregiving responsibilities were more common.

One of the caregivers described work-life interruptions such as:

*“Calling to make appointments, transporting to and from day services, doctor appointments, and general care all need to be done during the hours I typically work. Missing any amount of work, doubles up the work I need to complete when I return.”*

## Role of supervisors

Supervisors play an important role and significantly impact how employees experience stress. Supervisors set the tone for an organization, either helping or impeding their ability to maintain balance between their work life and caregiving responsibilities.

When asked about job difficulties, several respondents mentioned that the level of a supervisor's understanding is important. Specific responses included:

*“The just never knowing (is stressful). I am lucky. My boss is **FANTASTIC**”*

*“It is used as an excuse by my supervisor to not rely on me, to re-assign work, etc., even though I work many extra hours and am doing significant work.”*

*“Employer promotes work/life balance in words, but not actions.”*

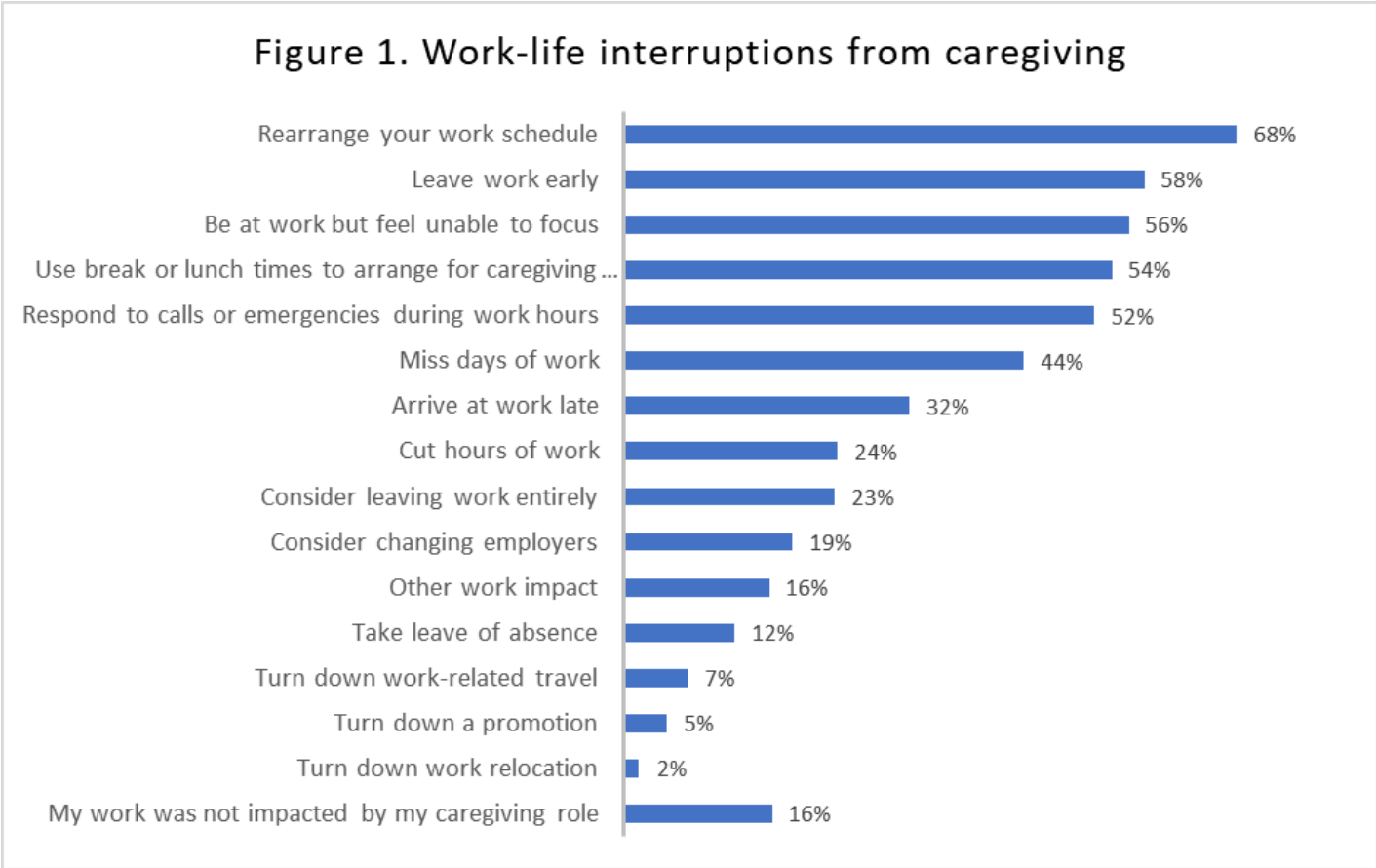
We encourage employers and businesses to consider how this information compares to what is happening in your own organizations. A little flexibility in the workplace or a couple hours a week of additional support could do much to ease employee stress levels and decrease their burden.

In fact, there is a good chance that flexibility in the workplace will also improve performance and pay off for employers in the end.

# Effects of Caregiving Responsibilities

More than 8 in 10 caregivers reported having their work-life interrupted by caregiving.

These interruptions varied in types, and rearranging their work schedule was the most common interruption (68%). **Figure 1** depicts the proportion of caregivers reporting interruptions in their work-life.



Beyond work-life interruptions, more than three quarters of caregivers we surveyed missed work due to caregiving (77%). When these employees missed work, they most often used personal time or other paid time off (52%) or were able to compensate using flexible hours (50%).

They also commonly reported using vacation time (38%), sick leave (31%), and working from home (31%).

Other findings:

- One in 5 caregivers used time off without pay. (22%)
- More than a quarter of caregivers had not been able to take a vacation in over a year. (27%)
- 17% had not been able to take a vacation away from caregiving responsibilities in two years.
- Despite the majority of survey participants missing work due to caregiving, only 13% had used the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or Wisconsin Family Medical Leave Act (WFMLA).

## Specific examples from caregivers

When asked about caregiving difficulties, employees gave several examples of the burden caregiving creates on their work-life.

*“Caregiving is a full-time job. If it isn't hands on care, it's arranging care. It is mentally exhausting. And then the job is also mentally exhausting. This leads to physical exhaustion to matter how much self-care or how many breaks you get/can take.”*

*“Difficult to balance work responsibility with caregiving responsibility... Always feel like I have to make a choice of which is more important—my [care recipient] or my job. Very stressful.”*

*“I cannot focus on working as I want to make sure my [care recipient] is OK.”*

*“I needed to schedule several doctor appts. that caused me to miss several hours of work each month.”*

When asked about how caregiving makes work-life difficult, almost two thirds of individuals reported that providing or arranging care had made their employment more difficult (60%). Caregivers reported consequences such as:

*“Took a demotion as I was unable to focus on career.”*

*“The need for so much schedule flexibility and missed work was a contributing part of losing my job. I now do freelance work instead.”*

*“Only able to work very part time (less than 20 hours per week).”*

*“Unable to work outside the home. Caregiving role is my job.”*



# Making change in the workplace

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Employers can provide resources, and many can provide some flexibility so that most caregivers are able to continue working. The reports below explain how some businesses are approaching the issue by designing workplace strategies that create a healthier work-life balance.

## National Reports

***“The Caring Company: How employers can help employees manage their caregiving responsibilities – while reducing costs and increasing productivity “***

— Harvard Business School

This report identified hidden costs associated with caregiving such as turnover costs, loss of institutional knowledge, and temporary hiring and overtime. Beyond explicit financial costs, employers may also have productivity loss due to unsupported caregiving such as missing work, being distracted while at work, unexpected events, and redistribution of work labor to colleagues. In order to become a more caring company, they suggest conducting a care census to understand the proportion and demographics of caregivers, survey employees on benefit offerings and what they find valuable, adding additional benefits to address unmet needs, and assessing impacts of benefits and benefit changes. You can find this resource and more resources on caregiving and the workplace at:

<https://www.hbs.edu/managing-the-future-of-work/research/Pages/the-caring-company.aspx>.

***“Caregivers in the Workplace: Finding Balance for Your Employees”***

— New York State Office for the Aging and the New York State Department of Labor

This report recommends assessing the needs of caregivers in the workplace by addressing demographics of caregivers, employee perceptions on how caregiving affects work, ideas/suggestions on how to support caregivers, challenges and rewards of caregiving, and knowledge of employer benefits. They also recommend exploring different policies in the workplace related to caregiving such as a caregiving policy defining benefits and resources, roles and expectations, and training for managers. Other policies and resources include workplace flexibility policies, federal family and medical leave programs, programs or services designed for caregivers, and family-friendly policies. You can find this resource at:

<https://lifespanrespite.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/State%20Tools/New%20York/Caregiver%20Guide%20for%20Businesses.pdf>

**AARP** offers many publications and educational opportunities designed specifically for caregivers. These resources are available in several different languages and are designed for different groups such as military families and LGBTQ families. You can find AARP Family Caregiver Support resources here:

<https://www.aarp.org/caregiving/prepare-to-care-planning-guide/>

***“Massachusetts Employer Toolkit to Support Working Caregivers”.***

— *The Executive Office of Elder Affairs, Massachusetts Business Roundtable, and Massachusetts eHealth Institute*

This resource includes several questionnaires to assess caregiver needs. Additionally they recommend programs and services such as a supportive caregiving culture, flexibility and paid time off, care delivery services, education and consultation services, and caregiver health and wellness programs. They include specific recommendations for how to implement these programs and services into the workplace.

You can find this resource at:

<https://macaregivercoalition.org/sites/mtc/files/documents/MeHI/MAEmployersToolkit.pdf>

## Local Resources

**Wisconsin’s Family Caregiver Support Programs** offer state and federal resources for caregivers, which are provided by counties and tribes. Learn more about local offerings at <https://wisconsin caregiver.org/> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinFamilyCaregiver>.

**The Wisconsin Department of Health Services** administers programs that, depending on need, age or health condition, may be able to provide in-home personal care, nursing services, housekeeping and chore services, minor home modifications, adaptive equipment, transportation, access to health care coverage, nutrition counseling, home delivered meals, Medicaid LTC coverage, caregiver respite, online caregiver training and other supports. More information about **Wisconsin Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)** is available at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/index.htm>.

The State of Wisconsin also offers resources specifically for dementia care, including a toolkit for employers on how to support employees who are caring for a loved one with dementia:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dementia/employers.htm> and a directory of information for caregivers of a loved one with dementia: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dementia/dementiareources.htm>

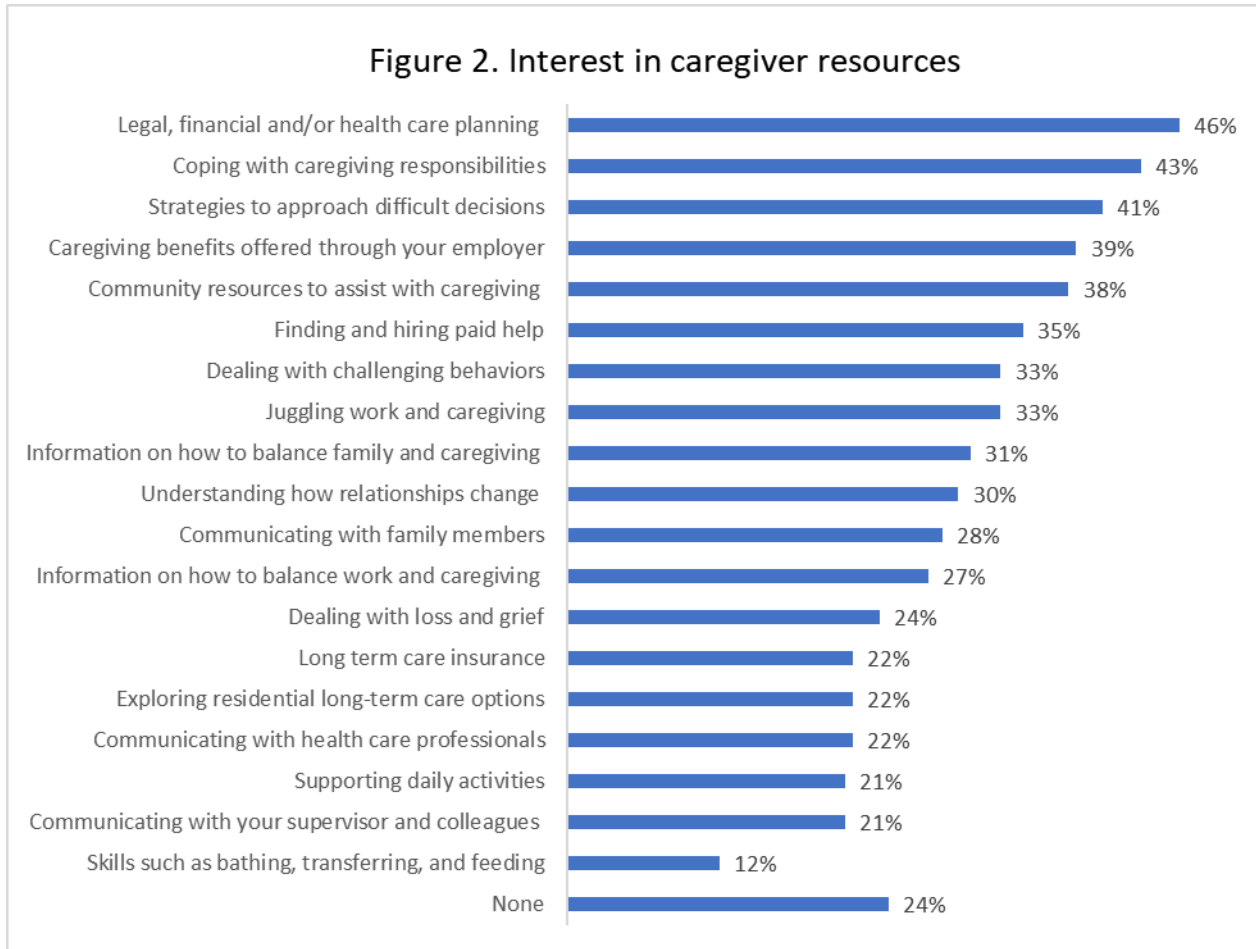
**The Respite Care Association of Wisconsin** offers free training for individuals interested in becoming a professional caregiver, a statewide caregiver registry, and offers respite grants to families that may not qualify for other state or federal programs. You can find information here:

<https://respitcarewi.org/training-courses/kit-for-caregivers/>.

## Education employees want

When asked which family caregiving topics they would like to learn about, caregivers were most receptive to resources regarding legal, financial, and/or health care planning (46%). Other areas of interest included resources regarding coping with caregiving responsibilities (43%), strategies to approach difficult decisions (41%), caregiving benefits offered through their employer (39%), and community resources to assist with caregiving tasks and responsibilities (38%).

**Figure 2** depicts the interest in all options of caregiver assistance resources.



## Preferred ways of receiving information

Respondents were asked how they would prefer to receive caregiving information if it were made available in the workplace.

Half of respondents indicated they would prefer to receive caregiving materials via email (50%). Other response types included online (45%), via fact sheet (39%), employee newsletter (31%), printed directory of caregiver services (27%), individual meetings (25%), lunchtime seminars (24%), on-site support groups (14%), and before or after work seminars (12%).

## Sustainability and caregiving

### Demographics of caregivers

Of all employees, about 79% had performed at least one caregiving task in the past six months, most (79%) were caring for an adult and some (18%) were caring for a child with a chronic illness, disability, or other healthcare need. These caregivers were primarily female (89%) and tended to be above the age of 46 (64%). **Figure 3** shows the breakdown of caregivers by age.

Caregivers were primarily caring for parents or parent-in-laws (56%), but also reported caregiving for children (27%) and spouses (14%). The condition of the care recipient varied, about half (51%) were caring for other care needs such as being frail or mobility issues. Other conditions included long-term health conditions (34%), emotional or mental health conditions (28%), intellectual or developmental disability (19%), and shorter-term health conditions (13%).

### Caregiver longevity

Most caregivers have been providing care to their care recipient for 1-5 years (46%). During the week a majority of caregivers typically spent 0-7 hours per week (52%), however, the second largest population of caregivers spent over 40 hours per week on caregiving (17%).

**Figure 4** depicts the proportion of hours respondents spent on caregiving. Many caregivers reported being able to provide care as long as they are necessary (44%), but over half reported that their current situation was unsustainable; that they would need additional help (32%), were unsure (18%), or would not be able to provide care as long as necessary (6%).

Figure 3. Caregiver age

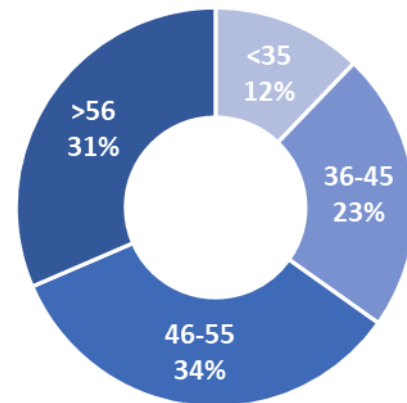
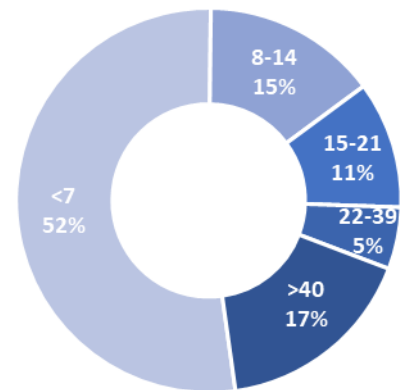


Figure 4. Hours spent caregiving





## Influences of the COVID-19 Pandemic

### Caregiving responsibility

More than half of respondents indicated that their caregiving responsibilities have increased compared to before the pandemic (54%) while only 15% of respondents indicated that their caregiving responsibilities have decreased compared to before the pandemic. 31% of respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree.” See **Figure 5**.

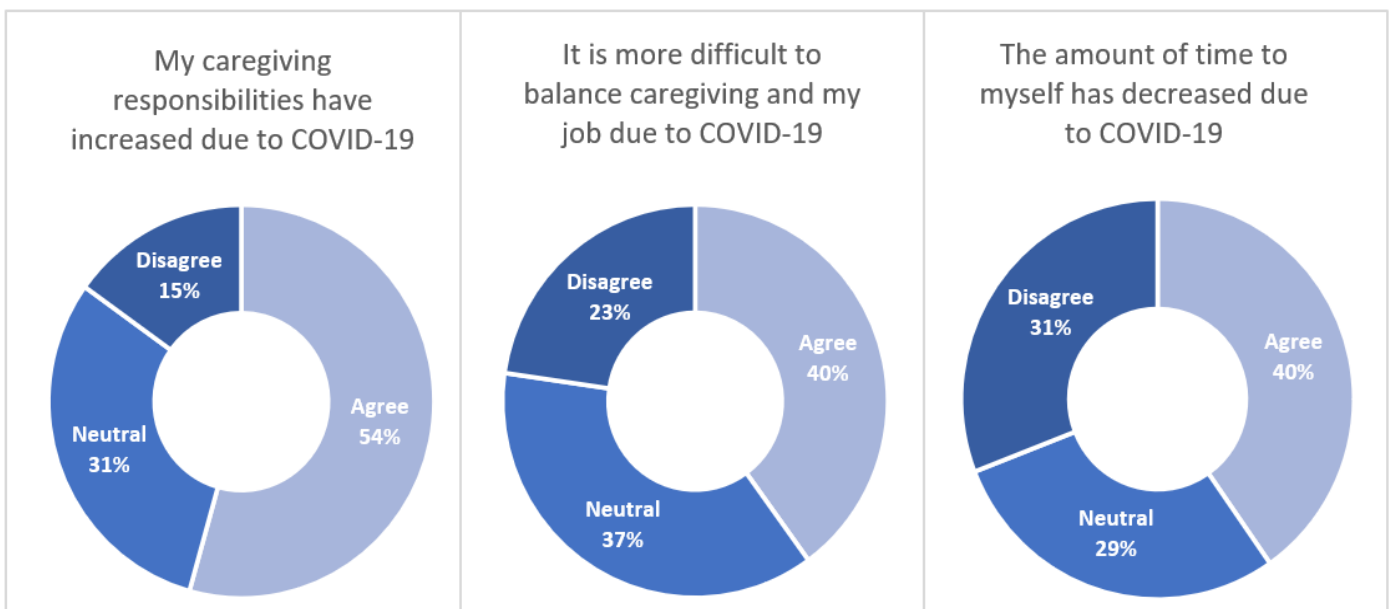
### Balancing caregiving and work

Four in ten caregivers indicated that the pandemic has made it more difficult to balance caregiving responsibilities and job-related work (40%) while 23% of caregivers responded that the pandemic has not made it more difficult to balance caregiving responsibilities and job-related work. 37% of respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree.” See **Figure 5**.

### Personal time

40% of caregivers indicated that the time they have to themselves had decreased as a result of the pandemic, while 31% of caregivers indicated that time they had to themselves had not decreased as a result of the pandemic. 29% of respondents indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree.” See **Figure 5**.

Figure 5. COVID-19 and caregiving



# Identifying Strategies for Your Own Organization

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Now it's your turn. Use the worksheet below to reflect on your own organization and identify next steps to help support your caregiving employees.

<p>What stands out in the report? How many employees in our organization are caregivers, and how is it impacting their work-life?</p>	
<p>What resources are currently available to support caregiving employees?</p>	
<p>Are caregiving employees using these resources? If not, why not? What can we change to make our programs and resources more accessible?</p>	
<p>What other needs are we seeing among caregiving employees? What programs or initiatives could we implement to meet those needs?</p>	
<p>What will we do first? Create a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bounded)</p>	
<p>How will we measure whether these changes are having a positive impact on our employees and organization?</p>	

# Notes

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# About The Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance

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The Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance (WFACSA) will address the needs of families who provide care, improve resource coordination, increase access to family supports and sustain Wisconsin families into the future.

## Our Vision Statement:

People of all ages and abilities, their families, and caregivers will have the supports needed to live and be included in their communities.

## We believe:

- Our communities are stronger when we work together to support each other.
- When family caregivers know information, have options and access to opportunities, they can better advocate for their needs and the needs of their loved one.
- The needs of the caregiver drive the prioritization of our shared resources.
- In encouraging one another to strive for positive outcomes and evidence-based decisions to further our mission and mutual goals.
- The community of family caregivers is a growing, and changing population served best when diversity is respected and celebrated.

## Mission Statement:

Our mission is to raise awareness of family and caregiver support needs and increase the availability of and access to services and supports (both paid and unpaid) which will keep people across the lifespan engaged in their community as long as they desire.

## Membership:

Disability and Aging advocacy groups and other organizations are invited to become members and get involved with the Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance. The WFACSA does not engage in lobbying activities but seeks to educate its members about public policy and other issues related to improved supports for caregivers.

If you would like to join WFACSA as an organizational or individual member, copy and paste this link:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WFACSAMembers>.

Or for more information send an email to [wfacsa@gmail.com](mailto:wfacsa@gmail.com).

