

 **Support Families by Addressing the Ongoing Caregiver Crisis**

Families who have children with disabilities want to live together at home and be active in the community. Wisconsin's ongoing long-term care workforce shortage is impacting families' ability to do this. Provider networks are shrinking due to low reimbursement rates, and local workforces find higher paying jobs. When direct support workers are difficult to find, families do their best to fill in the gaps. Many family caregivers leave the workforce completely or reduce work hours to ensure their children can stay at home. The constant stress is affecting the mental and physical health of entire families.

What can you do:

Support laws and policy that invests in Wisconsin's community-based child and adult long-term care workforce and provide pay and benefits to the in-home care workforce equal to what workers in facilities and health care settings receive. Same work = Same pay.

 **Support Special Education**

Wisconsin has under-funded special education for years and the pandemic has added to these challenges. Wisconsin only reimburses about 33% of local costs for special education, despite small percentage increases in the state budget the last several budget cycles. Public schools have an obligation to meet the needs of all students, including students with disabilities, but are not funded sufficiently to do so.

What can you do:

Increase special education funding to cover at least 90% of costs, to provide the quality education that students with disabilities need.

 **Support Children's Mental Health**

Wisconsin falls far short of recommended school staffing for services like school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and nurses who support students with mental-health needs. Students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities have the highest suspension rates and the second lowest graduation rates of any disability group, which could be improved by increased access to school-based mental health services.

What can you do:

Support sustainable funding for pupil services staff and for school mental-health service systems.

 **Ensure Families Can Access Healthcare**

Families of children with special health care needs and disabilities report increasing difficulty accessing healthcare with Medicaid. Rates for many Medicaid services are significantly less than private insurance rates. Because of this an increasing number of healthcare providers are limiting the number of Medicaid patients they see or not providing services to Medicaid patients and are not incentivized to become Medicaid providers. When children can't access the healthcare they need, and miss early intervention and preventative services, overall healthcare costs become higher in the long run.

What can you do:

Ensure Medicaid payment rates are comparable to the rest of the market, so more providers do not close their services to children with disabilities. Maintaining comparable rates can ensure these children have access to care.