



Personal Care Crisis

Stories from Wisconsin Personal Care Agencies

More than 120 personal care agencies who responded to the Wisconsin Personal Services Association's 2021 Workforce Survey report a dangerous shortage of personal care workers is threatening the health and safety of older adults and people with disabilities. Personal care workers are in-home caregivers who assist older adults and people with disabilities with things like getting out of bed, getting dressed, eating and bathing. Over 50% of agencies currently have seven or more open caregiver positions while 1 in 3 agencies have more than 10 open positions. The following are stories from agencies who provide services across Wisconsin.

"We cannot compete with many other businesses out there while paying our caregivers \$10.80/hr. They will always choose to work at Walmart or Kwik Trip when they can make over \$12.00 and \$13.00 dollars per hour. They can't make a living wage with us, so we understand why they go elsewhere!"

Agency serving Adams, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, Vilas, Waupaca and Waushara Counties

"Many small businesses in the field will need to close unless the reimbursement rate is raised to at least \$24 and hour."

Agency serving Dane, Eau Claire, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Waukesha Counties

"Our costs for recruiting and retention are approximately \$2,000.00 per month. This is a continual expenditure since we are seeing upwards to 50% turnover!"

Agency serving Calumet and Oconto Counties

“We have never been fully staffed for more than a week for the past 3 years.”

Agency serving Chippewa County

“With the wage personal care currently pays now, we cannot compete and consumers who need help constantly lose their caregivers due to the wage.”

Agency serving Adams, Calumet, Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Iowa, Juneau, Lafayette, Marquette, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Richland, Rock, Sauk, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington, Waukesha, Waupaca

“Good, reliable caregivers don’t want to work for less than \$14/hr.”

Agency serving Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Waukesha

“Wages are one of the top issues in retaining employees.”

Agency serving Milwaukee County.

“We do not get reimbursed enough from Medicaid to pay our caregivers more than \$10/hr. Most of our competition ONLY serves private pay clients.”

Agency serving Dane, Racine, Rock, Walworth

“I hire and interview daily. With the lack of pay, team members leave to work at Walmart or Kwik Trip for higher wages. I recently went to a home to do an admission where the client had not bathed in weeks and had little food. I went out and picked up a couple of items, and had a team member bath him, but we could not send anyone back for almost 2 weeks.”

Agency serving Brown, Calumet, Door, Kewaunee, Oconto, Oneida and Outagamie Counties

“Families are desperate to find caregivers. We are in a cycle right now where DHS keeps imposing more rules and regulations on agencies without an adequate increase to the personal care budget, so the overhead expenses to run a personal care agency are through the roof.”

Agency serving Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Rock, Walworth, Washington, Waukesha Counties

“With the shortage of staffs/clients, the workload is overflowing with EVV. With the minimum budget, we are sinking deeper and deeper since 2020. With the implementation of EVV, we have to hire a full-time staff assigned to EVV. This is a big operational cost for the agency. We are torn apart when we have to turn away clients. We cannot continue to operate this way, although, it’s our passion to serve our community especially those in need.”

Agency serving Calumet, Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Green, Green Lake, Iowa, Lafayette, Marquette, Milwaukee, Sauk, Sheboygan, Waukesha Counties.

“The difficulty to staff clients is getting harder and harder each year. This is without Covid playing a role. No one wants to work for less than \$12 an hour, and even at that wage it is hard to hire staff. If the reimbursement rate doesn’t change, you will see many more home health care agencies closing.”

Agency serving Adams, Calumet, Chippewa, Clark, Columbia, Dodge, Dunn, Eau Claire, Fond du Lac, Green, Green Lake, Juneau, Lafayette, Langlade, Lincoln, Marquette, Milwaukee, Oneida, Ozaukee, Racine, Richland, Sauk, Sheboygan, St. Croix, Walworth, Washington, Waukesha, Waupaca, Waushara Counties

“The current rate of service is not enough for small businesses to fairly compete with larger companies and franchises, we’ve taken on additional expenses with PPE equipment due to COVID-19. Administrative costs for these services do not reflect the actuals costs of facilitating quality services and the pay is not rewarding for essential workers who have also continued to serve the vulnerable population even during a deadly pandemic.”

Agency serving Columbia, Dane, Rock Counties.

“Currently our field pays less on average than McDonald’s. To even be able to retain employees we have to be able to increase the wages they receive. I have seen more and more cases of people leaving to go to jobs far less rewarding and far less needed than caregiving.”

Agency serving Chippewa County

“There are too many times we cannot help a client due to lack of caregivers. We will have clients request for services and 50% of the time they don’t have a caregiver. We cannot find qualified and available caregivers because the job is not paying enough to keep caregivers. The only way we can increase pay to attract and keep caregivers is to get more funding.”

Agency serving Brown, Fond du Lac, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Outagamie, Sheboygan and Winnebago Counties

“We hosted a job fair. No one came...We are fortunate to have some workers who have been with us for a long time. Getting someone new has been harder than we imagined however, and our current staff is getting tired.”

Agency serving Barron, Menominee and Polk Counties

We have some rural areas where we have over 120 plus open hours for elderly clients and have a waiting list of 10-15 clients on top of that. We have some areas where we have been trying to find staff for clients and they are waiting over 6 months with not one staff applying to help them.”

Agency serving Calumet, Fond du Lac, Manitowoc and Sheboygan Counties

“We would like to be able to pay employees more so the agency isn’t struggling to hire and keep personal care workers...With current hourly wage it’s not always possible to pay the requested wage, keep personal care workers long-term and it’s close to impossible to cover any overtime.”

Agency serving Jefferson, Kenosha, Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Sheboygan and Waukesha Counties

“We have an estimated 5 clients that have relocated due to not receiving enough hours and needing to have additional family support. We have two additional people pending.”

Agency serving Milwaukee, Racine and Waukesha Counties

“I have had caregivers leave to work at a factory and make more in an hourly wage than what we can pay them per hour through Medicaid funds. In addition, there is not enough to pay for benefits which is a huge retention factor.”

Agency serving Chippewa, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Pierce and St. Croix Counties

“The EVV has been a real strain. I had employees quit, some are ready to quit...the pay is horrible and we are losing clients and workers.”

Agency serving Manitowoc, Milwaukee, Outagamie, Sheboygan, Winnebago

“Current low reimbursement rates do not allow for us to pay competitive wages in many areas of Wisconsin. Cost of implementation of EVV and training has been an added financial burden during these times. Continued expectations such as EVV have discouraged new hires as well as forcing existing caregivers to quit.”

Agency serving Calumet, Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Green, Green Lake, Iowa, Rock, Sauk, Sheboygan, Walworth

“The pay is very little to cover all employee costs and pay employees a livable wage. Our agency cannot offer a higher pay to keep our turnover rate of workers down.”

Agency serving Milwaukee and Sheboygan Counties.

“Caregiver retention has been difficult as I cannot pay a wage that will compare with other places due to the current Medicaid reimbursement.”

Agency serving Milwaukee, Racine Counties.

“These are our front line workers. There are issues keeping good staff based on the rates we are paying them.”

Agency serving Milwaukee, Racine Counties

“Without supportive home care workers, people will end up in nursing homes which will cost the government several times what supportive home care costs.”

Agency serving Dane, Racine, Rock and Walworth Counties

“Federal mandate of EVV, Medicaid/HMO insurance prior authorization denial, and the reduction of service hours is putting more patients at risk of sickness, frequent hospitalization, and going without care because it is hard to find workers.”

Agency serving Fond du Lac, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Washington, Waukesha Counties.

“Caregivers should be respected, treated with dignity and honored for the work they do. Instead they feel anxiety and stress if they do not report hours correctly in an app to get reimbursed for the fraction of the work they do.”

Agency serving Milwaukee County.

“Current reimbursement rates do not allow agencies to compete with retail businesses for employees. As minimum wage is increased retail can raise prices for goods and services, Personal Care/Supportive Home Care Agencies cannot.”

Agency serving Grant, Iowa, Lafayette Counties

“We pay our workers as well as we can. We would like to offer benefits, but can’t afford to do that with the current reimbursement rates.”

Agency serving Dunn County

“We are worried that our staff are going to burn themselves out due to the number of hours that the staff we do have are working.”

Agency serving Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties

“The insufficient funding for care services and community-based supports reduces or eliminates service availability and perpetuates a false promise to Wisconsin citizens and their families seeking much needed services.”

Agency serving Dane, Green, Rock, Sauk and Walworth Counties

“Agency is unable to provide employee benefits to employees due to low reimbursement rate.”

Agency serving Milwaukee County

“Being a Medicaid agency, it is challenging to pay personal care workers at a high hourly rate with benefits.”

Agency serving Chippewa, Dunn, Eau Claire, St. Croix

“Increased reimbursement rates mean we can recruit better workers.”

Agency serving Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine and Waukesha Counties

“There’s many personal care workers who resigned due to the use of EVV due to the barriers which then causes a lack of financial stability to them and a lack of personal care workers to care for our clients, which puts our clients at an increased risk for falls and hospitalization.”

Agency serving Milwaukee County