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**Minnesota Caregivers Respond to Governor Walz’s Long-Term Care Budget**

*The Governor’s plan to address the long-term care crisis is a step forward - but it doesn’t go nearly far enough*

ST. PAUL, MINN. – As the workforce crisis in long-term care continues to decimate the sector, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz released a budget that will not solve the lack of access to care for seniors and their families throughout the state. The proposed budget falls far short of providing the solutions needed today to support Minnesota’s one million older adults.

Over 20% of direct caregiving positions are unfilled, placing enormous strain on the ability of nursing homes and assisted living facilities to meet the needs of all Minnesota seniors who daily seek care. The shortage has forced hundreds of locations to place holds on new admissions, denying care to seniors approximately 11,000 times per month.

Governor Tim Walz recently announced his administration’s workforce and healthcare spending priorities for the 2023-2024 budget. The Governor’s proposal calls for higher rates and “other system changes,” as well as inflationary updates for waiver providers and permanent grant programs to expand caregiver recruitment and retention, with special emphasis on rural and underserved communities.

“The Long-Term Care Imperative appreciates the Governor’s recognition of the importance of senior caregivers as a top workforce issue for the new legislative session. However, the initial funding estimations for the Governor’s initiatives won’t address the severe access crisis facing Minnesota’s seniors, families, and caregivers,” said Kari Thurlow, President and CEO of LeadingAge Minnesota. “It is our hope that state lawmakers recognize the immediate needs of seniors and maximize state support with bi-partisan legislation that supports our seniors wherever they call home.”

Since the state government sets the rates at which providers can be reimbursed for care, the health of Minnesota’s long-term care ecosystem is largely dependent on the decisions of lawmakers. Reimbursement rates are the chief determinant of care providers’ ability to pay caregivers fairly, retain staff and meet standards for the quality of care.

“The Governor proposed moderate rate increases for part of the sector, but those increases will not be enough to address our admission holds and expenses to recruit and retain an adequate workforce. Legislation is needed to give providers the stability they need to pay caregivers fairly, while also preparing Minnesota’s long-term care infrastructure for the future,” said Patti Cullen, President and CEO of Care Providers of Minnesota.  “While we appreciate strategies to increase worker pipelines for our sector, they will have minimal impact if they’re not simultaneously coupled with adequate, up-front investments to support increases to caregiver wages so we can attract and retain these new professionals.”

“The state has a responsibility to ensure seniors receive the care they and their families need in their home communities,” said Emily Hartzog, a nurse at a long-term care setting in Mankato. “By increasing current funding and allowable rates for nursing home reimbursements and other senior care options, caregivers will be paid what they need and deserve. We will then have enough workers to be able to safely open up admissions again in our settings.”

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*The Long-Term Care Imperative is a collaboration of LeadingAge Minnesota and Care Providers of Minnesota, two of the state’s largest long-term care associations. The Long-Term Care Imperative is committed to advancing a shared vision and future for older adult housing, health care and supportive services.*

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