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Wisconsin Celebrates National Family Caregiver Month with the Formation of Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance

As the nation recognizes the contributions of Family Caregivers annually in November, this year disability and aging stakeholder organizations in Wisconsin are using the occasion to announce their combined efforts to draw attention to the state's caregiver crisis and implement strategies for improvement.

According to a 2013 AARP report, 578,000 caregivers in Wisconsin provide an estimated 538 million hours of unpaid care to children and adults with disabilities and older adults. This amounts to more than \$7 billion in unpaid care, which would cripple our health care system if it were not provided. The uncalculated personal costs to family caregivers are often less time on the job, lost wages, worsening health and social isolation.

Over the next two decades Wisconsin baby boomers will age out of their peak caregiving years (ages 45-64), leaving families struggling to find supports for frail elders and to keep adult children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) out of crisis when their family member can no longer provide care. According to the State of the States in Developmental Disabilities Project, 17% of Wisconsin's caregiving families for someone with I/DD are aged 60 years or more; 13% of caregivers are siblings taking care of their brothers or sisters with I/DD. Like many states, Wisconsin also faces a critical shortage of paid caregivers that will be needed to replace support formerly provided by family members.

In August of 2017, Wisconsin aging and disability advocates convened at the Johnson Foundation at Wingspread in Racine to form a statewide coalition to address family support and caregiving solutions for the future. More than thirty individuals and organizations from across the state participated.

The ***Wisconsin Family and Caregiver Support Alliance*** is dedicated to:

- Engaging employers and creating support for employees providing care for family members
- Expanding respite care options statewide
- Improving navigation and access to caregiving or family support resources
- Expanding Future Planning/Advanced Planning for all residents

There are solutions to the challenges ahead, but it will take all of us to design them. Stay tuned for more news on the work of the ***Wisconsin Family Caregiver Support Alliance*** in 2018.