



6/2/21

Sen. Howard Marklein and Rep. Mark Born, Co-Chairs, and Members, Joint Finance Committee

From: *In Control Wisconsin* (ICW) Board of Directors<sup>1</sup>

**Subject: A Fair Share for IRIS Participants in the 2021-23 State Budget**

In recent years, the IRIS Program has become a bigger and bigger part of Wisconsin's community long-term care (LTC) system. Over 22,000 people in Wisconsin (29% of the adults in community LTC) have chosen IRIS and self-direction. IRIS is particularly popular in rural areas, where there is a shortage of provider agency services and people need the flexibility to hire independent workers.

Much attention has been paid to inadequate reimbursement rates and the detrimental impact of the LTC workforce crisis in nursing homes and Family Care. We agree that addressing these concerns should be a high priority in the 2021-23 state budget. We also know that IRIS Program participants are experiencing a similar crisis and consequently should also be a high priority.

*In Control Wisconsin* and other advocacy groups have heard many reports from IRIS participants across the state who can't find direct care workers to provide the hours of service that are included in their IRIS plans, because their IRIS budgets are insufficient to pay the wages necessary to successfully recruit workers. This is clearly a crisis and it puts the health, safety and psychological well-being of IRIS participants at risk.

As the Committee considers rate increases for LTC provider agencies and direct care workers to address the crisis, we encourage you to come up with solutions that benefit the entire LTC system. All sectors of the system have been under great strain during the pandemic. Part of that strain is the unfortunate fact that many direct care workers have left the LTC system during the last year, which has exacerbated the LTC workforce crisis.

If any funding is provided to address this crisis in the LTC system, it should be allocated according to the principle of parity between IRIS and other LTC programs, not just for the coming biennium but for the longer-term future. Wisconsin has long believed that there should be a level playing field between Family Care and IRIS, since the same eligibility criteria apply to both programs. People entering the LTC system must have a real choice between these programs. If one program is adequately funded and the other one is not, that's not a level playing field and there isn't a real choice.

**We ask that you treat IRIS fairly and give IRIS participants a Fair Share in this budget.**

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<sup>1</sup> *In Control Wisconsin* was formed to advocate for and enhance the quality of self-direction opportunities within Wisconsin's long-term care system.