

# THE PATH AHEAD

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THE CAREGIVER EDITION

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**tmg**<sup>®</sup>  
Let's clear the path ahead.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREGIVERS

November is National Family Caregiver Month. It is a time to honor and thank the people who provide care and support. It's also an opportunity to raise awareness about caregiving issues and increase support for caregivers.

Unfortunately, the caregiver crisis means some people cannot get the care they need. Many organizations and people are working to create awareness and find ways to solve this problem. One advocate who is passionate about this is **Annie Heathcote, the 2023 Ms. Wheelchair Wisconsin**. Annie used her platform to speak about the importance of caregivers.



**“My caregivers help make my life function,” says Annie. “I always tell people that caring is caregiving.”**



When Annie describes caregiving as caring, it helps people understand that there are many ways to support others. Caring can be visiting someone or cooking

a nice meal or helping someone who needs extra support with things like getting dressed or transferring into their wheelchair.

Annie says that talking about caregiving is an essential part of helping raise awareness about the shortage of caregivers. It can also encourage people to consider becoming professional caregivers, which can be a rewarding career. For example, college students can work a flexible schedule around their classes while giving someone the help they need. Friends and family members can get paid to look after their loved ones.

While finding caregivers is not always easy, Annie says that there are things you can do to help your search. One tip is always to be

looking for potential caregivers. This includes posting jobs on social media like Facebook and job boards. It also means asking people if they know of anyone who might be interested in becoming a caregiver.

When Annie meets someone unsure if being a caregiver is right for them, she invites them to observe one of her other caregivers work a shift. It allows the person to see the job and decide if they'd like to work for Annie. While being a professional caregiver isn't for everyone, it can be an excellent fit for many people.

**“I find the best caregivers are the ones who are willing to listen and learn and respect you as a person,” says Annie.**

Once you've found a caregiver, it's important to begin building

a good relationship with them. Communication and kindness are key. When training new caregivers, clearly communicate how you want things done. Mistakes may happen, so try to be patient and forgiving.

When someone hires a caregiver in the IRIS program, the caregiver is an employee of the IRIS participant, and it is essential to have good boundaries. A benefit of having a long-standing caregiver is building connections with others. In Annie's experience, she found that it's not unusual for her to become friends with her caregivers.

**“My caregivers, who have become my friends, give me physical care, and I give them emotional care,” says Annie.**

There's no denying that the relationship between caregivers

and the people they support can be very meaningful. Annie's grateful for all the caregivers who have been on the journey with her and were there to witness her big life milestones – like prom, graduation, or winning Ms. Wheelchair Wisconsin. She hopes that everyone needing caregivers finds help and that more people take on the challenging yet beautiful experience of becoming a caregiver.

**“I think because we have our caregivers, we're able to get up every day and live life independently,” says Annie. “We can participate in all the amazing opportunities that life offers!”**

**Follow Annie on Facebook at [bit.ly/annieheathcote](https://bit.ly/annieheathcote)**

## CAREGIVING THROUGH LOVE

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For many people, being a caregiver for a family member or friend can be a fulfilling experience for both people and strengthen the relationship.

For **Ricki Bellos and William Christiansen** – a couple from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, who have been married for 43 years – finding extra support through the IRIS program and the TMG IRIS Consultant Agency helped William get out of a nursing care facility and back into their home.

After William had a stroke several years ago, he needed full-time care. William had to live in a nursing facility for seven months since his home wasn't ready for adaptive equipment. Ricki visited William daily, but they both wanted to get him moved back into their home.

Ricki worked closely with William's TMG IRIS Consultant until they found the resources through Options for Independent Living and Habitat for Humanity to get a modular wheelchair ramp installed and modified their bathroom. Today,

William is happy to be back at home, and the two are enjoying living together again.

**“It's been work, but it's very rewarding because I get to see him every day,” says Ricki.**

After many decades of being together, Ricki says that caring for William was only natural. Of course, they had to adjust to their new normal, including finding new ways to communicate since William could no longer speak after his stroke.

Though Ricki is his primary caregiver, she and William hired two other caregivers using William's IRIS budget. While William's caregivers were there, Rickie could see they were doing a great job with him. That meant she could take that time to run errands, work in the garden, read, make music, and see friends.



Ricki also built a good relationship with William's TMG IRIS Consultant, who helps keep her calm and finds solutions to ensure William gets the care and support he needs.

Knowing they have William's caregivers and TMG IRIS Consultant on their team has helped keep William happy and safe and it provides Ricki the support she needs to keep from burning out.

**“I learned to let go a little bit and let somebody else pick up some of the slack and accept help when somebody offers it,” says Ricki.**



While there's no denying that being a caregiver can be challenging, Ricki wouldn't have it any other way. She's also grateful that they have resources and a team to help them, thanks to the IRIS program. Ricki and William mostly appreciate being near each other for as long as possible.

**“I just keep thinking about why I fell in love with him in the first place. It sustains me through all of it,” says Ricki. “I steal smooches now and then, too!”**



## RESOURCES FOR CAREGIVERS

**Wisconsin Family Caregiver Support Programs** is an excellent resource to find support in each county in the state. Not sure if you are a caregiver? Take the Are You a Caregiver quiz, then check out the Virtual Events for Caregivers page and the Resources section.

**Learn more:** [wisconsin caregiver.org](http://wisconsin caregiver.org)

### **AARP's Family Caregiver Resources for Wisconsin**

provides a list of resources for home and community-based resources, financial and legal resources, care for caregivers, and more.

**Learn more:** [states.aarp.org/wisconsin/caregiver-resources](http://states.aarp.org/wisconsin/caregiver-resources)

**AARP's Virtual Community** offers many free online events - from informative topics like estate planning and how taxes affect social security benefits to fun events like virtual "Paint and Sip" classes and Zumba workouts. You don't have to be an AARP member to join these events!

**Learn more:** [local.aarp.org/virtual-community-center](http://local.aarp.org/virtual-community-center)

**Wisconsin's Respite Care Registry** connects family caregivers needing a little break with professional respite care workers. Search this free registry to find the providers in your area. **Learn more:** [respitecarewi.org/registry](http://respitecarewi.org/registry)

## WISCAREGIVERS CAREERS

The caregiver crisis has left many people struggling to find enough care. To help solve this issue, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS), in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, recently launched a free Certified Direct Care Professional (CDCP) training program, WisCaregivers Careers.

Participants can complete the 30-hour online training and testing at their own pace. After completing the program, they will automatically join the registry to connect with employers throughout Wisconsin. You could also receive a \$500 bonus by working for an eligible employer.

More than 3,200 participants have signed up for this program, which could provide much-needed relief for those needing more caregivers. Interested in joining?

**Learn more:** [wiscaregivercdcp.com](http://wiscaregivercdcp.com)



## ELECTRONIC VISIT VERIFICATION UPDATE

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On May 1, 2023, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) fully launched Electronic Visit Verification (EVV). EVV is an electronic system that verifies that you have received personal and supportive home care services authorized under the IRIS program and other Wisconsin long-term care programs. In IRIS, workers who live with you do not have to use EVV.

If you have questions about EVV or need assistance using EVV successfully, please get in touch with your Fiscal Employer Agency (FEA) or your TMG IRIS Consultant.

**Learn more: [dhs.wisconsin.gov/evv](https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/evv)**



## MEDICAID RENEWAL INFORMATION

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Special rules that were in place during the COVID pandemic to ensure people had the needed Medicaid services ended earlier this year.

To keep your benefits, you must update important information with the state each year. If you require a renewal, you will receive a renewal packet 45 days before your due date. Only renew once you receive this information and quickly do so. You will remain covered until your renewal. You can find your renewal date by logging into your account on **[access.wi.gov](https://access.wi.gov)** or by using the MyACCESS app. If you have further questions, please reach out to your IRIS Consultant.



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## FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

**A lot has been happening on TMG's Facebook and LinkedIn pages! Have you visited them lately?**

There, you can read up on important news and events, learn about others who are living self-determined lives and see what TMG has been up to all across the state. Be sure to share your favorite posts and become part of the broader self-determination community in Wisconsin!



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