
Wisconsin State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Annual Report

Federal Fiscal Year 2025



Introduction and Statutory Authority

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP or Ombudsman Program) is authorized under the Older Americans Act and governed by the federal LTCOP Rule (45 C.F.R. Part 1324) which establishes the program's functions, responsibilities, and person-centered advocacy framework.

Under federal law, the Ombudsman Program is required to identify, investigate, and resolve complaints made by, or on behalf of, individuals receiving long-term care services; protect and promote the rights, health, safety, and welfare of long-term care consumers; and inform consumers about the availability of Ombudsman services and how to access them.

The program is further authorized to represent the interests of consumers before governmental agencies; ensure access to administrative, legal, and other remedies; and evaluate the performance of the long-term care system, including relevant laws, regulations, and policies. Based on this evaluation, the Ombudsman Program recommends changes to improve the quality of care and quality of life for long-term care consumers.

Purpose of the Report

This annual report provides an evaluation of Wisconsin's long-term care system from a consumer perspective, based on Ombudsman program case and complaint data. It highlights key trends and issues affecting long-term care consumers, identifies opportunities for Ombudsman advocacy, and informs policymakers, providers, and system partners on ways to improve the quality of care and quality of life for older adults in Wisconsin.

Compliance Statement

This report fulfills the annual reporting requirements of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program under the Older Americans Act, Section 712(h)(1) (42 U.S.C. 3058g(h)(1)). The report summarizes program activities, analyzes complaint and program data, identifies key issues affecting long-term care consumers, evaluates program effectiveness, and highlights opportunities to strengthen long-term care services and consumer protections in Wisconsin.

Program Overview

Wisconsin's LTCOP is a statewide advocacy program that protects and promotes the rights of long-term care consumers. The program serves individuals aged 60 and older who live in nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, or participate in publicly funded long-term care programs (Family Care, Partnership, PACE, IRIS).

The State Long-Term Care Ombudsman provides overall leadership and management of the program, and is responsible personally, or through Ombudsman representatives, for carrying out the duties defined in federal law by:

- Responding to and resolving concerns regarding actions, inactions, or decisions that adversely affect consumers,
- Advocating for changes to improve quality of care and quality of life,
- Representing the interests of consumers before governmental agencies,
- Educating consumers, their families, and providers about rights, good care practices, and available resources, and
- Ensuring that consumers have regular, timely, and confidential access to the Ombudsman Program.

Ombudsman representatives are trained, certified, and designated in accordance with federal requirements to carry out the duties of the Ombudsman Program.

The program relies on a combination of paid staff and volunteer Ombudsman representatives to provide advocacy services throughout Wisconsin.

A map of service regions is available on the program website: [Ombudsman Program Coverage Map](#) and [Volunteer Program Coverage Map](#).

Our Mission:

To protect and promote the rights and self-determination of Wisconsin's long-term care consumers through independent, consumer-directed advocacy.

Program Activities

The Ombudsman Program provides a range of services to advance our mission and ensure the overall health and stability of Wisconsin's long-term care system. These services include:

Complaint Investigation and Resolution

- Ombudsman representatives investigate and work to resolve complaints made by or on behalf of long-term care consumers.

Facility Visits and Monitoring

- Ombudsman representatives regularly visit long-term care settings to educate consumers, identify concerns, and monitor quality of care and quality of life.

Information and Assistance

- Ombudsman representatives provide information and consultation regarding resident rights, complaint resolution options, and long-term care resources.

Facility Staff Training

- Ombudsman representatives provide education and training to facility staff on resident rights, person-centered practices, and other topics affecting consumer well-being.

Family and Resident Council Support

- Ombudsman representatives support the development of resident and family councils and encourage consumers to raise concerns and advocate for improvements through these forums.

Community Education and Outreach

- Ombudsman representatives participate in community events and educational activities to promote awareness of consumer rights, good care practices, and available Ombudsman services.

Systems Advocacy

- The program identifies trends and systemic issues and works with consumers, providers, policymakers, and partner organizations to improve long-term care services and supports.

Program Data and Trends

Consumers Served

129k+ People living in long-term care facilities and enrolled in Wisconsin's Medicaid long-term care programs

6,000+ Long-term care facilities

1,278 Total Cases

3,431 Complaints investigated

4,416 Total facility visits

995 Individual facilities visited

481 Resident councils attended

6,527 Information and assistance contacts to individuals

2,162 Information and assistance contacts to long-term care providers

109 Training sessions for long-term care providers

106 Community education opportunities

Complaint Trends

3,431 Total complaints investigated

18% Increase from Federal Fiscal Year 2024

Top 5 Complaint Domains

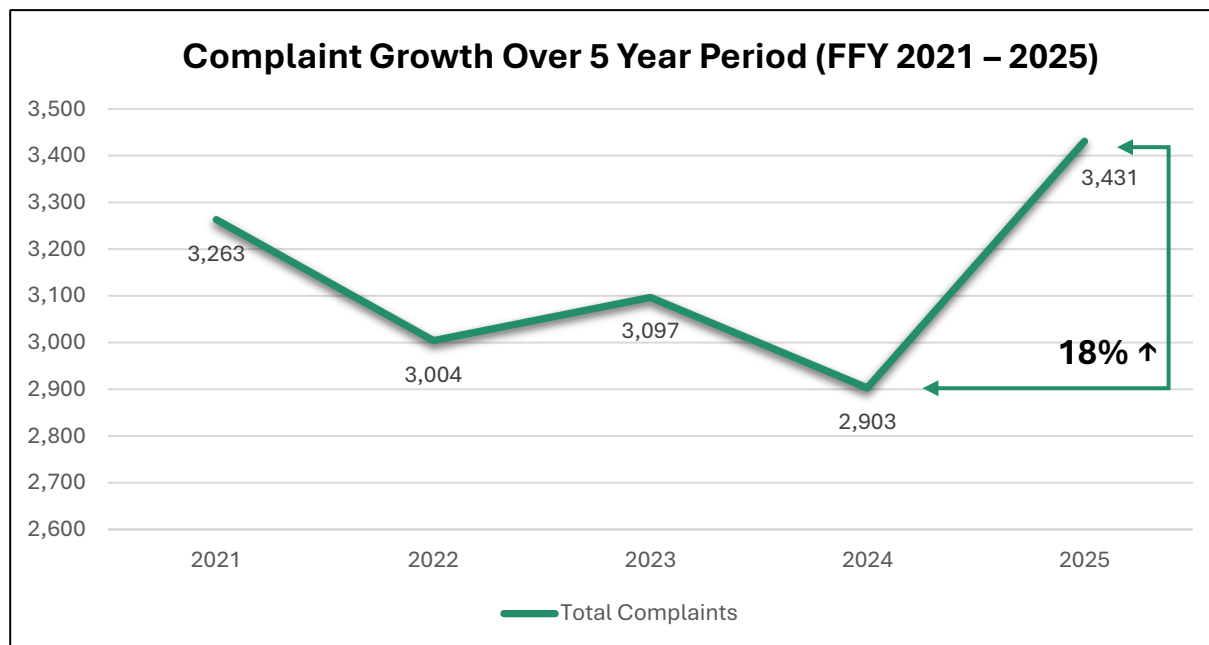
- 1 Care
- 2 Autonomy, Choice, Rights
- 3 Complaints about an Outside Agency*
- 4 Admission, Transfer, Discharge, Eviction
- 5 Facility Policies, Procedures, and Practices

The complaint domains represent the most frequently reported concerns across all long-term care settings and Medicaid long-term care programs served by the Ombudsman Program.

*Most complaints in this category (88.5%) were related to Medicaid long-term care programs, including Family Care, Partnership, PACE, and IRIS.

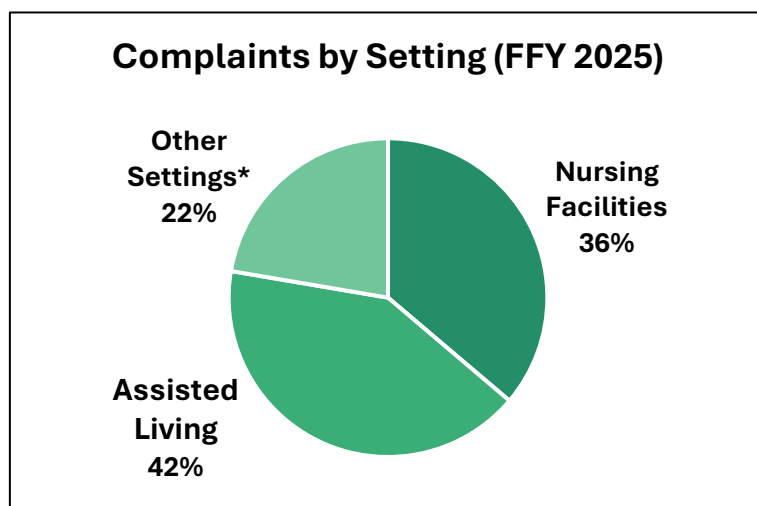
Each complaint domain encompasses a variety of specific issues and concerns. For example, the Care domain includes complaints related to care planning, accidents and falls, responses to requests for assistance, medications, assistive devices, and access to health-related services. While the frequency of specific complaints may vary across settings, these rankings provide a high-level view of the issues most commonly affecting long-term care consumers in Wisconsin and offer insight into the overall health and stability of the long-term care system.

Detailed descriptions of the complaint domains and codes can be found here: [National Ombudsman Reporting System: Complaint Codes and Definitions](#).



Complaint volume has generally trended upward over the past five years, with an 18% increase from Federal Fiscal Year 2024 to 2025. The increase may reflect a growing service population, increasing consumer needs, ongoing care and treatment challenges, as well as expanded Ombudsman presence and engagement in long-term care settings, particularly assisted living.

Where Complaints Occurred



While complaint volume increased in both nursing facilities and assisted living settings, assisted living accounted for the largest share of complaints in FFY 2025.

*Most complaints occurring in “other settings” involved Wisconsin’s Medicaid long-term care programs, including Family Care, Partnership, PACE and IRIS.

Outcomes

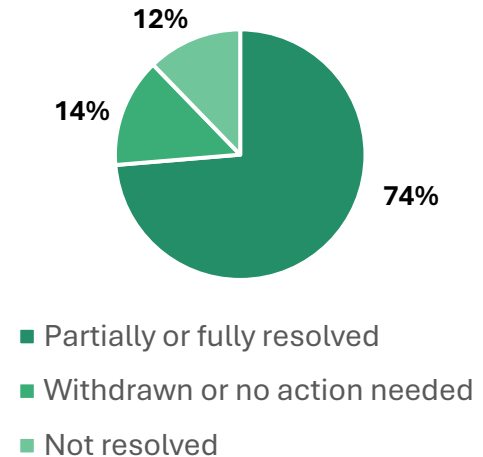
Complaint Resolution

Because Ombudsman advocacy is consumer-directed, complaint resolution is determined by the consumer's assessment of the outcome rather than the Ombudsman's perception of success.

Approximately 74% of complaints brought to the program were fully or partially resolved to the satisfaction of the consumer in FFY 2025.

The share of complaints not resolved has declined steadily over five years, decreasing from 24.49% in FFY 2021 to 12.24% in FFY 2025.

Resolution Outcomes FFY 2025



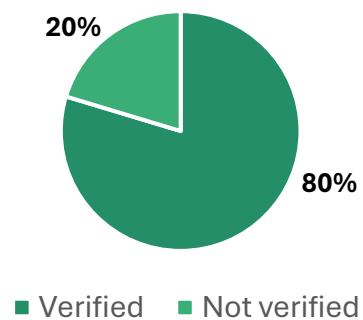
Complaint Verification

Complaint verification occurs when an Ombudsman investigation finds that most or all facts alleged in a complaint are likely to be true.

Approximately 80% of complaints received in FFY 2025 were verified.

A complaint that is not verified may still reflect a consumer concern, unmet need, or differing perception of the situation. In these cases, Ombudsman representatives may continue working with consumers to identify solutions and support person-centered outcomes.

Complaints Verified FFY 2025



Who is Bringing Forward Concerns?

Most complaints are brought forward by individuals receiving long-term care services and their family members, friends, or legal representatives.

47% Consumers receiving long-term care services and supports

41% Family members, friends, and legal representatives

Additional complaints are reported by facility staff, community partners, Ombudsman representatives, and other concerned individuals.

Key Issues Affecting Consumers

Care and Care Planning

Care planning has consistently ranked among the top complaint categories across long-term care settings over the past five years. After several years of decline, care planning complaints increased by 49% from Federal Fiscal Year 2024 to 2025, reaching a five-year high. Care-related complaints in both nursing facilities and assisted living settings also reached their highest levels between 2021 and 2025, with more rapid growth occurring in assisted living.

Ombudsman representatives attribute these trends in part to increasing resident acuity, particularly in assisted living communities serving individuals with complex medical and memory care needs. Many concerns involve communication, coordination, and resident involvement in decisions regarding care and services.

49%↑ Care planning complaints (FFY 2024 to 2025)

25%↑ Care-related complaints (FFY 2024 to 2025)

Dignity, Respect and Accountability

Many complaints received by the Ombudsman Program involve whether consumers feel listened to, treated with dignity and respect, and meaningfully involved in decisions affecting their care and daily lives. The program views a facility's or long-term care provider's internal complaint and grievance process as an important accountability mechanism and an opportunity to identify and resolve concerns before they escalate.

Across all settings, complaints related to autonomy, choice, and rights increased by 27% from Federal Fiscal Year 2024 to 2025, with response to complaints and dignity and respect concerns cited most frequently. Response-to-complaint issues ranked as the number one complaint type for both nursing homes and assisted living settings during Federal Fiscal Year 2025, reaching a five-year high. Complaints involving dignity and respect also increased significantly following several years of decline.

90%↑

Response-to-complaint concerns in nursing facilities
(FFY 2024 to 2025)

148%↑

Response-to-complaint concerns in assisted living
(FFY 2024 to 2025)

59%↑

Dignity and respect concerns (FFY 2024 to 2025)

Managed Care and Self-Directed Services

Complaints involving Medicaid long-term care programs, including managed care (Family Care) and self-directed service programs (IRIS), have increased steadily over the past five years. From Federal Fiscal Year 2021 to 2025, these complaints increased by 34%, including a 15% increase from Federal Fiscal Year 2024 to 2025.

While most complaints continue to involve individuals receiving home and community-based services in their private homes, the fastest growth has occurred among consumers residing in facilities. During Federal Fiscal Year 2025, managed care complaints increased by 250% among nursing facility residents and 132% among assisted living resident compared to the previous year.

These trends highlight the growing intersection between Medicaid long-term care program and residential long-term care settings, as well the increasing complexity of the systems consumers must navigate to access services and supports.

34%↑ Complaints involving Medicaid long-term care programs (FFY 2021 – 2025)

250%↑ Managed care complaints in nursing facilities (FFY 2024 to 2025)

132%↑ Managed care complaints in assisted living (FFY 2024 to 2025)

Relocations and Other Long-Term Care Transitions

Complaints involving transfers, discharges, evictions, and other transitions remain consistently high across long-term care settings. In nursing facilities, Federal Fiscal Year 2025 represented a five-year high, with discharge and eviction-related complaints increasing 65% from the previous year. Discharge and eviction complaints in assisted living settings remained relatively stable over the same period.

These complaints often involve some of the most disruptive and high-risk events consumers experience, including involuntary transfers, discharges, and concerns regarding housing stability, continuity of care, and access to needed services.

Several factors may be contributing to these trends including managed care-driven transfers to less restrictive settings, provider contract terminations, increased use of discharge and transfers to address complex care needs, and reductions in skilled nursing facility capacity.

65%↑ Discharge and eviction complaints in nursing facilities (FFY 2024 to 2025)

23%↑ Admission, transfer, discharge, and eviction complaints (FFY 2021 to 2025)

Facility Operations and Administrative Oversight

Facility operations and administrative processes play an important role in supporting quality care, consumer rights, and accountability. Concerns involving staffing, scheduling, communication, policy implementation, and administrative oversight can directly affect a consumer's health, safety, welfare, and quality of life.

Complaints related to facility policies, practices, and procedures declined substantially between Federal Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 before increasing 33% in Federal Fiscal Year

2025. Administrative oversight concerns increased significantly during the year, rising 86% in nursing facilities and 100% in assisted living settings.

Staffing-related concerns declined by 19% in nursing facilities but increased by 26% in assisted living settings. These trends suggest continued operational challenges in some settings and highlight the importance of effective leadership, communication, and oversight in ensuring quality services and supports.

33%↑

Complaints related to facility policies and practices
(FFY 2024 to 2025)

86%↑

Administrative oversight concerns in nursing facilities
(FFY 2024 to 2025)

100%↑

Administrative oversight concerns in assisted living
(FFY 2024 to 2025)

Program Priorities and Future Directions

Care Planning as a Rights Lever

Based on Ombudsman complaint data, strengthening person-centered care planning represents a significant opportunity to improve quality of care and quality of life outcomes for long-term care consumers.

Care plans are more than clinical documents. They reflect an individual's life history, preferences, values, goals, and support needs. Effective, person-centered care planning helps mitigate risk and guides many of the decisions that shape a consumer's experience, including services, supports, transfers, discharges, and restrictive interventions.

In many ways, care plans are the primary mechanism through which consumer rights are put into practice. While Ombudsman advocacy often occurs through complaint resolution, focusing on care planning practices presents an opportunity for prevention through consumer education, provider consultation, and systems advocacy.

Strengthening care planning across long-term care settings, including home and community-based services, may help reduce rights violations and other significant care-related concerns before they occur.

Strengthening Consumer Awareness and Advocacy in Assisted Living

Assisted living cases and complaints have grown steadily over the past decade, reflecting sector growth, increasing resident acuity, and greater reliance on assisted living as an alternative to nursing facility care. Increased Ombudsman presence and engagement in these settings, especially through the Ombudsman Volunteer Program, has also expanded opportunities for consumers and family members to identify and report concerns.

Family members and legal representatives play a critical role in assisted living advocacy. While Ombudsman services are consumer-directed, family members and legal representatives are often the first to identify concerns, seek information, and initiate contact with the program. In Federal Fiscal Year 2025, family members and legal representatives were the primary source of complaints in assisted living settings.

Strengthening consumer and family awareness of resident rights, available advocacy resources, and the role of the Ombudsman Program represents an important opportunity to improve quality of care and quality of life outcomes in assisted living settings. Future efforts may include expanded consumer and family education, development of resident and family councils, targeted outreach, and initiatives that strengthen accountability and responsiveness when concerns are raised.

Strengthening Advocacy in Managed Care and Home and Community-Based Services

Concerns involving Medicaid long-term care programs are a growing priority area for the Ombudsman Program, with complaints increasing steadily over the past five years. While many of these concerns involve individuals receiving services in the community, recent trends indicate increasing overlap between Medicaid long-term care programs and facility-based care systems.

This trend reflects growing complexity related to service coordination, continuity of care, discharge planning, and accountability across systems. Consumers increasingly navigate multiple service delivery systems simultaneously, requiring advocacy that considers both resident care settings and Medicaid-funded long-term care services.

To respond to these evolving needs, the Ombudsman Program will continue strengthening its expertise in managed care and self-directed services through staff training, competency development, and cross-training initiatives. Continued investment in specialized managed care expertise may also be necessary to ensure consumers receive effective advocacy as these systems become increasingly interconnected.

Strengthening Consumer Protections During Long-Term Care Transitions

Transfers, discharges, evictions and other relocation-related concerns remain a significant area of Ombudsman advocacy and reached a five-year high in Federal Fiscal Year 2025.

These situations often involve some of the most disruptive events consumers experience and can have significant implications for housing stability, continuity of care, health outcomes, and consumer rights.

Increasingly, relocation events involve coordination across multiple systems, including long-term care providers, Medicaid managed care organizations, family members, and state agencies. As long-term care systems become more interconnected, effective advocacy requires a coordinated approach that ensures consumers remain informed, involved, and supported throughout the relocation or transition process.

Future Ombudsman efforts will focus on strengthening consumer protections during transitions, improving coordination among system partners, and identifying opportunities to promote consistency, transparency, and accountability in discharge, transfer, and relocation practices across long-term care settings.

Additional Systems Advocacy Efforts

Beyond the priorities identified in this report, the Ombudsman Program continues to monitor broader policy and system issues that affect long-term care consumers. As service systems become increasingly complex and interconnected, ongoing attention to consumer protections, accountability, transparency, and program capacity remains essential.

Ombudsman Program Funding and Capacity

As the aging population grows and long-term care systems evolve, demand for Ombudsman services continues to increase. The program supports sustained federal and state investment in Ombudsman services, including resources that strengthen advocacy in assisted living and home and community-based services.

Family Caregivers and Natural Supports

Family members and natural supports play an important role in identifying concerns, supporting consumer decision-making, and promoting accountability within long-term care systems. The program supports policies and practices that strengthen caregiver engagement while preserving consumer choice and self-determination.

Workforce Development and Staff Competency

Quality long-term care depends not only on adequate staffing levels but also on staff training, experience, and ongoing professional development. The program supports efforts

that strengthen workforce stability and competency across long-term care settings and programs.

Transparency and Accountability

Consumers and families benefit from clear information regarding provider ownership, organizational responsibility, and available avenues for resolving concerns. The program supports initiatives that promote transparency, accountability, and informed consumer decision-making.

Resident Rights and Consumer Protections

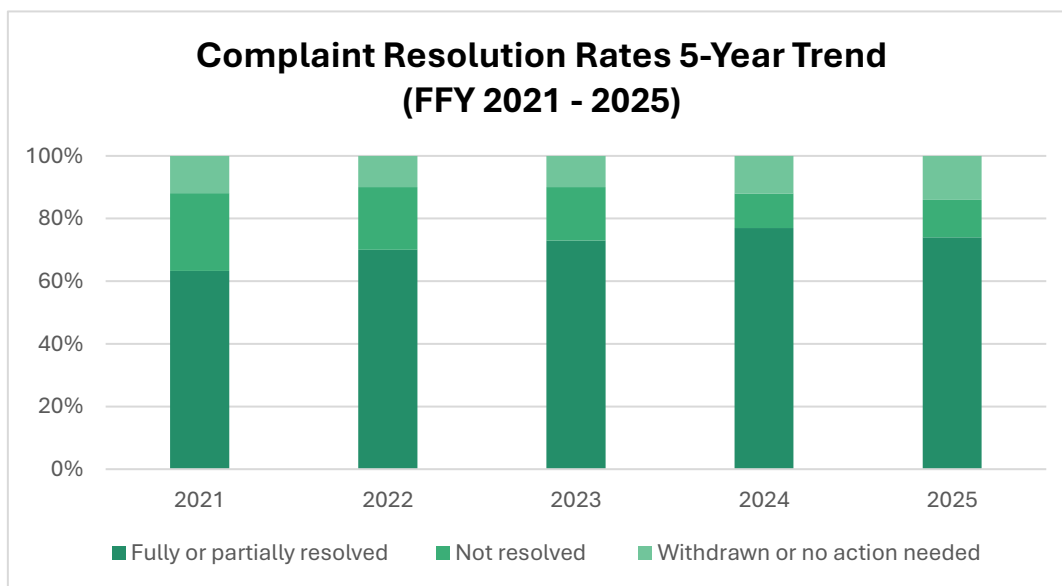
As consumers increasingly move between long-term care settings and service systems, opportunities may exist to strengthen consistency in resident rights protections, consumer education, and advocacy resources.

Program Effectiveness and Challenges

Successes

Complaint Resolution Rate – All Settings and Programs

Despite increasing demand for services, the Ombudsman Program maintained strong complaint resolution outcomes, consistent with [national Ombudsman program performance](#).



Facility Presence and Access

The Ombudsman Program continued to expand its presence in long-term care settings during Federal Fiscal Year 2025 through increased facility visitation and routine access activities. Regular Ombudsman presence helps ensure consumers have access to advocacy services, information about their rights, and opportunities to raise concerns.

40%↑

Nursing facilities receiving at least one Ombudsman visit per quarter (FFY 2024 to 2025)

106%↑

Assisted living facilities receiving at least one Ombudsman visit per quarter (FFY 2024 to 2025)

Information and Assistance

The Ombudsman Program expanded information and assistance services during Federal Fiscal Year 2025, providing consumers, family members, providers, and other stakeholders with education regarding resident rights, advocacy options, and long-term care resources.

43%↑

Information and assistance to consumers, family members, representatives, and the public (FFY 2024 to 2025)

18%↑

Information and assistance to facility staff and providers (FFY 2024 to 2025)

Volunteer Contributions

Volunteer Advocates play an important role in expanding the program's reach and support consumer advocacy throughout Wisconsin.

99

Volunteer Advocates as of September 20, 2025

6,527

Total hours donated

27%↑

Total hours donated (FFY 2024 to FFY 2025)

Challenges

Ombudsman-to-Consumer Ratio

Demand for Ombudsman services continues to grow as Wisconsin's long-term care system expands and becomes increasingly complex. While the program has continued to improve access to services and maintain strong outcomes, the current Ombudsman-to-consumer ratio (1:5,609)¹ remains significantly above [recommended staffing benchmarks](#), limiting the program's ability to provide the level of advocacy and routine access envisioned under federal law.



1:5,609



Awareness and Understanding of the Ombudsman Role

Ensuring consumers, family members, legal representatives, providers, and system partners understand the role of the Ombudsman Program remains an ongoing priority. The Ombudsman Program operates under a consumer-directed advocacy mode, meaning advocacy efforts are guided by the preferences, goals, and informed choices of the consumer.

This approach can differ from other service models and may create confusion regarding the Ombudsman's role, authority, responsibilities, and limitations. Misunderstanding about confidentiality requirements, consumer direction, and the Ombudsman's independent advocacy can affect expectations and collaboration among consumers, families, providers, and other stakeholders.

Continued investment in consumer education, outreach, and partner engagement will help strengthen understanding of the Ombudsman role, improve collaboration, and ensure individuals seeking assistance understand how the program can support them.

¹ The ratio was calculated by dividing the estimated service population (129k) by the number of Ombudsman Representatives including leads and specialists (23), then rounding to the nearest whole number.