

# *Western Wisconsin Cares*

1407 St. Andrew Street, Ste. 100  
La Crosse, WI 54603

Phone: 608-785-6266 Toll Free: 877-785-6266 Fax: 608-785-6315

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For more information, contact:  
Tim Garrity – 608-785-6062

## **Long-Term Care District Starts Service in Vernon County** *Western Wisconsin Cares Begins Regional Family Care Expansion*

A program that provides a wider array of long-term care options to seniors and adults with disabilities officially began operating in Vernon County over the weekend. The Western Wisconsin Cares Long-Term Care District assumed responsibility Nov. 1 for providing services to 128 county residents through expansion of the state's Family Care program.

Expansion into Vernon County represents a significant step in the regional effort to help more adults in need of assistance with everyday tasks remain at home or in the community, noted WWC Executive Director Tim Garrity.

"It is exciting to be involved in an initiative that will help improve the quality of life in a practical way for so many individuals in our area," Garrity said. "In light of tough economic times, it also is gratifying to know that the home- and community-based services so many people want often provide more cost-effective alternatives than institutional placements."

Vernon County was one of eight counties that approved creation of the long-term care district, a new type of public organization formed specifically for the purpose of operating an independent managed long-term care program. Buffalo, Clark, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Pepin and Trempealeau counties also participated in creation of the district.

WWC took over operation of the existing La Crosse County Family Care program on Oct. 1 and will continue to expand into a new county each month through April. The organization first will begin serving consumers already receiving home- and community-based services in a county and then start enrolling individuals on wait lists for those services in that county.

Over the next two years, WWC expects to begin serving another 135 Vernon County residents who currently remain on wait lists for home- and community-based services. A total of more than 500 individuals in the eight-county region await such options as home care, respite and assisted living. Two years after enrollment begins in a county, any individual who meets functional, financial and other eligibility requirements may choose to join the program.

Family Care seeks to maximize the health and independence of enrolled members through a flexible benefit package that combines traditional Medicaid services with the home- and community-based programs administered by counties. Each county will cease to operate the latter "waiver" programs once Family Care enrollment begins in the county.

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