



Caring for Older Adults and Caregivers at Home (COACH)

This model of care shows promise to increase rural Veterans' access to care and services, and is recommended for replication at other facilities.

Medical Issue

Currently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides health care and other services to more than 151,000 Veterans with dementia, with an estimated total cost of ~\$4 billion dollars.

Dementia negatively impacts an individual's cognitive functions, resulting in a decreased ability for those affected to function independently.¹ Most Americans living with dementia receive care from family members and friends. Many studies have found increased levels of psychological distress and lower subjective well-being and physical health associated with caregiving.² The progressive frailty, caregiver strain, and significant behavioral challenges often result in the individual being moved to a long-term care facility.

Access Challenge

Many individuals with dementia experience challenges accessing needed services because of the travel involved, emotional stress, and confusion the Veteran may experience.

Solution

Caring for Older Adults and Caregivers at Home (COACH) is a home-based dementia care program that assists Veterans with moderate to severe dementia living at home with a caregiver and within 50 miles from the

the VA medical center, the Durham VA Health Care System, and Morehead City Community-Based Outpatient Center (CBOC).

The program provides support; education on dementia and behavioral management; referrals and assistance with resources; recommendations to address safety in the home; delays nursing home placement; and reduces caregiver workload. The COACH program respects caregivers' wishes to keep their loved ones living at home for as long as possible while improving the quality of life of the Veteran/caregiver dyad.

Since its inception, in 2010, the COACH program has served more than 1,100 Veterans with more than 120 new Veterans enrolled each year. The COACH program has expanded to three additional VA facilities with plans for continued expansion.

Program results include:

- Improved quality of life for Veterans with dementia
- Decreased health care costs resulting from long term care facility placement
- Reduced caregiver burden through support groups and education
- Increased access to dementia related services
- Addressed and reduced safety hazards at home
- Identified and improved Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) related to Veterans' needs, supporting the program's sustainability

- Decreased nursing home placements from 7% to 4% among COACH patients in a year³
- Received highest satisfaction from caregivers
- Improved behavioral symptoms management

The COACH program provides an innovative care coordination model that supports Veterans with dementia and their caregivers, allowing for VA providers to meet the needs of rural Veterans by improving access to additional services and resources.

¹ Plassman, B.L., Langa, K.M., Fisher, G.G., Heeringa, S.G., Weir, D.R., Ofstedal, M.B., Burke, J.R....Wallace, R.B. (2007). Prevalence of dementia in the United States: The aging, demographics, and memory study. *Neuroepidemiology*, 29(1-2), 125- 132.

² Brodaty, H., & Donkin, M. (2009). Family caregivers of people with dementia. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 11(2), 217-228.

³ Song, Wei, Intrator, Orna, Twersky, Jack, Davagnino, Judith, Kinosian, Bruce, Wiedland, Darryl. (2020) Utilization and Cost Effects of the VHA Caring for Older Adults and Caregivers at Home (COACH) Program.

Office of Rural Health

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To support the health and well-being of rural Veterans, ORH and its Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers establish and disseminate initiatives that increase access to care for the 2.7 million rural Veterans enrolled in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system. Key focus areas include programs that address workforce shortages, transportation, primary care, mental health, telehealth and specialty care. To learn more, visit www.ruralhealth.va.gov.