

# Rural Promising Practice: 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 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> The progressive frailty, caregiver strain, and significant behavioral challenges often results 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 VA Medical Center (VAMC), Greenville Health Care Center, and Morehead City Community Bases 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 burden. 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 almost 600 Veterans with more than 120 new Veterans enrolled each year. The COACH program has demonstrated the following results:

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

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.

## To Learn More

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) implements a targeted, solution-driven approach to increase access to care for the 3 million Veterans living in rural communities who rely on VA for health care. As VA's lead advocate for rural Veterans, ORH works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To accomplish this, ORH leverages its resources to study, innovate and spread enterprise-wide initiatives through partnerships.

To discuss implementing a Rural Promising Practice at your facility or to learn more, visit [www.ruralhealth.va.gov](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov) or email [rural.health.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:rural.health.inquiry@va.gov).

<sup>1</sup> Danila, M. et al. (2016). A multi-modal intervention for Activating Patients at Risk for Osteoporosis (APROPOS): Rationale, design, and uptake of online study intervention material. *Contemporary Clinical Trials Communication*, 4, 14-16.

<sup>2</sup> International Osteoporosis Foundation. (2016). Impact of Osteoporosis. Retrieved from <https://www.iofbonehealth.org/impact-osteoporosis>

