

CAREGIVER CONSORTIUM NEWSLETTER



Spring 2023|
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Welcome to the Spring issue of the Caregiver Consortium Newsletter, a collaboration between VA caregiver researchers, to keep you informed of research findings.

In this issue, we are highlighting results of:

- 1) A Partnered Evaluation of the Enhanced Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS)
- 2) Ensuring Access to and Quality of Care for Caregivers of Veterans During COVID-19, and
- 3) Barriers to Accessing Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) among Informal Caregivers of Veterans across Eras.

We welcome your feedback!
Please send your comments or information about relevant research for caregivers to:
julie.parishjohnson@va.gov

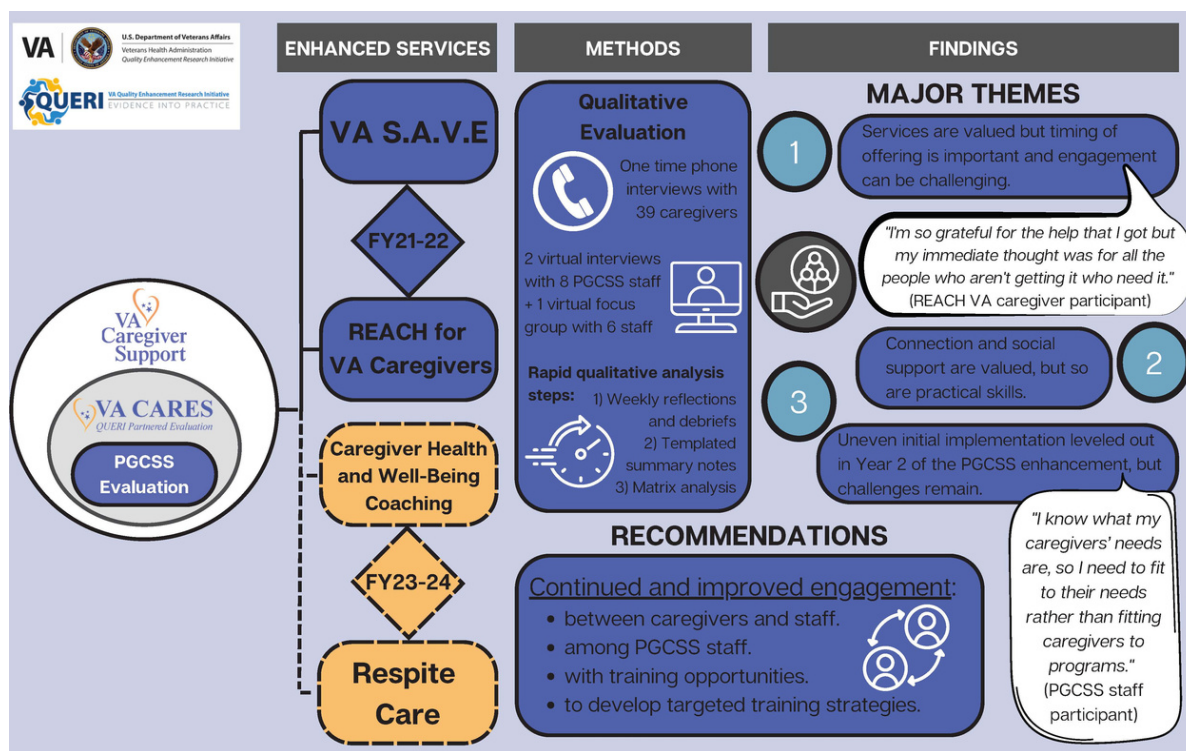
PARTNERED EVALUATION OF THE ENHANCED PROGRAM OF GENERAL CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES



Authors: Melissa Harris-Gersten, Lauren Penney, Courtney Van Houtven

As part of an ongoing evaluation of the VA Caregiver Support Program (CSP), in FY21 – FY22 the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative (QUERI) VA Caregiver Support Program Partnered Evaluation Center (VA CARES) conducted a formative qualitative evaluation of evidence-based Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS) enhancement services: VA S.A.V.E Training for Caregivers and the Resources for Enhancing All Caregivers Health (REACH) VA Program.

The evaluation aimed to understand caregivers’ experiences with these two services and factors that might have impacted those experiences. Information was collected from 39 caregivers who participated in VA S.A.V.E and/or REACH VA and 14 PGCSS staff from seven sites implementing the services.



Three overarching themes were identified:

- services are valued but timing of offering is important and engagement can be challenging
- connection and social support are valued, but so are practical skills; uneven initial implementation leveled out in Year 2 of the PGCSS enhancement, but challenges remain.
- Caregivers and staff expressed the value of these services and offered several suggestions for improvement.

This formative evaluation provided rich knowledge that will be used to improve support for caregivers across the VA. Future VA CARES evaluation efforts will focus on the Caregiver Health and Wellbeing Coaching Initiative (CHWC) and respite care services offered through PGCSS.

ENSURING ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF CARE FOR CAREGIVERS OF VETERANS DURING COVID-19



Authors: Martindale-Adams JL, Stark D, Scariano L, Green A, & Nichols LO

Background:

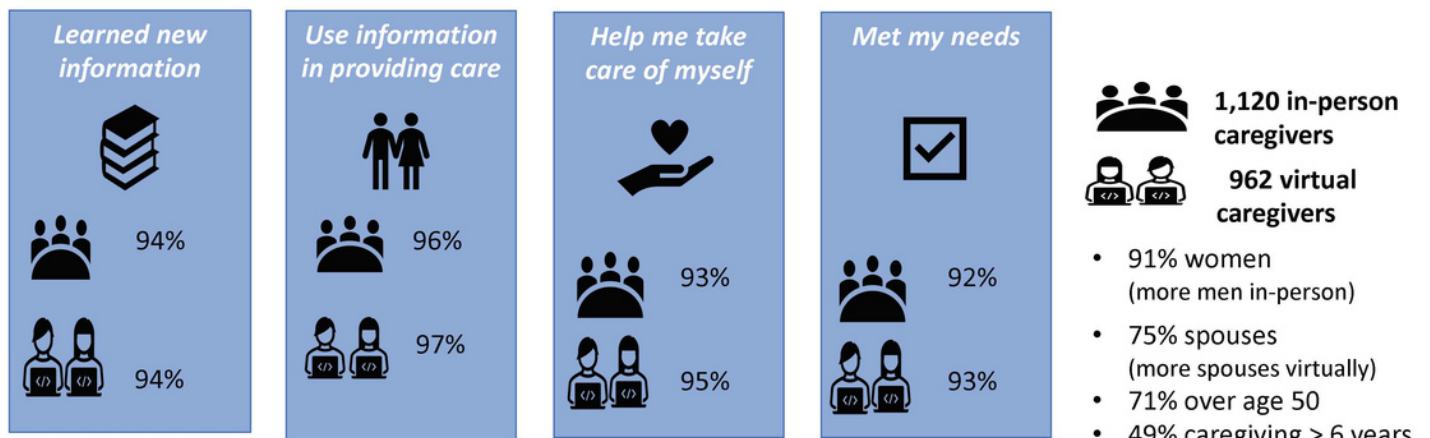
Since the start of the VA's national Caregiver Support Program, self-care – helping caregivers to manage stress and improve their physical and emotional well-being – has been a priority. With the advent of COVID 19, in-person self-care courses for groups of caregivers of Veterans were no longer possible and transitioned from in-person to virtual videoconferencing.

Caregivers and instructors needed to learn new technology and ways of interacting. While virtual courses had decreased travel costs for trainers and caregivers, questions arose about whether caregiver satisfaction and benefit were similar to in-person.

Caregivers (1120 in-person, 962 virtual) who attended a course before or following the March 2020 transition to virtual were compared. Caregivers in both groups were similar to caregivers of Veterans nationally, primarily women (91%) and spouses (75%), with 71% over age 50 and 49% providing care for 6 years or more.

Ensuring Access to and Quality of Care for Caregivers of Veterans During COVID-19

Are caregiver satisfaction and benefit similar for in-person and virtual self-care courses?



Findings: Caregiver satisfaction and benefit are similar

Recommendation: Continue virtual self-care courses

Martindale-Adams JL, Stark D, Zuber JK, Scariano L, Green A, Nichols LO. (2023). Pandemic Shift: Virtual Self Care Courses for Caregivers. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, Post-Pandemic Special Issue. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-022-00294-y>

To access the full-text article, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-022-00294-y>

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AMONG INFORMAL CAREGIVERS OF VETERANS ACROSS ERAS



Authors: Trivedi R, Ngo V, Lee T, Humber MB, Risbud R, Jacobs JC, Lorenz K, Asch SM, Gallagher-Thompson D & Leykum L.

Introduction: For the nearly two thirds of older adults who experience significant disability-related impairments, home- and community-based services (HCBS), are essential to facilitate aging in place. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) offers many HCBS. However, these programs are underutilized, and access barriers experienced by the informal caregivers are poorly understood.

Objective: To understand unmet needs and barriers to accessing HCBS from the perspectives of Veterans' informal caregivers.

Design: Qualitative study using grounded theory.

Participants: Caregivers who provided care for 8+ hours per week in the prior 6 months to a Veteran seen at the VA Palo Alto Healthcare System and performed 1+ instrumental activity of daily living.

We interviewed 23 informal caregivers (64.5±12.1y; 74.0% women; 45.0% White; 30% Black; 15.0% Hispanic; 95.2% pre-9/11 caregiver).

Key Takeaways:

- 1) Caregivers need clearer, more accurate, and timelier information from VA and non-VA HCBS
- 2) Caregivers report lack of time to evaluate and access HCBS, amplified by COVID-19 restrictions
- 3) Caregivers seek support with coping with their caregiving responsibilities, and with maintaining their own health
- 4) Caregivers and Veterans differ in their perception of need for HCBS and/or desire to access with HCBS
- 5) Caregivers report strains in their interpersonal relationship with Veterans due to this difference in perceptions.

