

Supporting Diverse Family Caregivers: Spotlight on Volunteers of America Minnesota-Wisconsin

Nearly one in four older adults dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid has Alzheimer’s disease or related dementia,¹ and dually eligible older adults have higher rates of chronic conditions than Medicare-only beneficiaries.² Caring for individuals with dementia and other chronic conditions often involves significant physical, emotional, and financial support from family members. To meet the needs of family caregivers, providers and health plans may benefit from strategies for supporting caregivers through services such as respite services, counseling, and training and education.

Family caregivers come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and health plans report challenges providing supports that meet their cultural needs and preferences.³ This Spotlight, showcasing Volunteers of America Minnesota-Wisconsin (MN-WI), is part of a series highlighting innovative programs supporting diverse family caregivers.

Volunteers of America MN-WI serves vulnerable populations across its two-state region. Their [Culturally Responsive Caregiver Support and Dementia Services](#) program serves African American, East African, and Hmong communities specifically in the Twin Cities region of Minnesota.

Target Population

Volunteers of America MN-WI tailors family caregiver services to the various communities they serve. While focusing on African American, East African, and Hmong communities, they offer support to all communities of color in the Twin Cities region and they recently began a partnership with a local organization serving the Hispanic community.

Volunteers of America MN-WI advertises their programs through television and radio, flyers placed in hospitals and clinics, presentations at local organizations, and referrals from current caregiver participants to others in their community. They also engage local faith-based organizations to reach caregivers who attend local churches and mosques. As described under [Partnerships with Health Plans](#), they also receive referrals from health plan case managers.

“Working with the Culturally Responsive Caregiver Support and Dementia Services has helped me to better understand Alzheimer’s”
 - Caregiver participant

¹ The Medicare Payment Advisory Committee (MedPAC) and the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC) (January 2018). *Data Book: Beneficiaries Dually Eligible for Medicare and Medicaid*. Retrieved from https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Jan18_MedPAC_MACPAC_DualsDataBook.pdf

² Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (2018). *Medicare fee-for-service and managed care enrollment, CY 2013*. Retrieved from https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Jan18_MedPAC_MACPAC_DualsDataBook.pdf#page=57

³ Reinhard, S., et al. (2017). Emerging Innovations in Managing Long-term Services and Supports for Family Caregivers. *AARP Public Policy*. Retrieved from http://www.longtermscorecard.org/~media/Microsite/Files/2017/2017%20Scorecard/AARP1202_EI_EmerInnovationLTSS_Oct31v2.pdf

Innovative Programs Supporting Diverse Family Caregivers

Volunteers of America MN-WI began providing culturally responsive family caregiver support services through a pilot program focused on individuals with dementia and their caregivers in the African American community in the Twin Cities area. Their success with this pilot led to a long-term program funded by a variety of grants, including grants to support expansion into the East African and Hmong communities. While the organization has historically focused on services for individuals with dementia and their caregivers, they also serve caregivers of individuals with other conditions.

Volunteers of America Minnesota-Wisconsin's Culturally Responsive Caregiver Support Services

- Caregiver Support Groups
- Caregiver Monthly Breakfasts
- Respite Services
- One-on-one Coaching

Volunteers of America Minnesota-Wisconsin provides four primary culturally responsive caregiver support services: support groups, caregiver breakfasts, respite services, and one-on-one coaching. Volunteers of America MN-WI encourages participant donations based on a sliding scale but does not deny services to caregivers unable to pay.

Caregiver Support Groups

Support groups provide family caregivers a safe place to share their experiences with and learn from other caregivers. Volunteers of America MN-WI holds support groups in convenient community locations familiar to caregivers, such as community centers and churches. While targeted to caregivers of individuals with memory loss and dementia, the groups are open to caregivers of individuals with other chronic conditions. Support groups include guest speakers on relevant topics, such as grieving, managing diabetes and arthritis, and advance care directives.



Caregiver Monthly Breakfasts

Volunteers of America MN-WI offers monthly breakfasts as an informal way for caregivers to connect with other caregivers. The organization tailors the breakfasts to each community; for example, they shifted the breakfast timing to accommodate Muslim caregivers observing Ramadan. Volunteers of America MN-WI also provides onsite respite services to support caregiver participation. The breakfasts include a meal and conversation along with guided chair-based exercises, education, and community resources.

Through their volunteer respite services program, **A Knu Day**, former family caregivers who previously participated in coaching or other support services provide respite services for other caregivers. Volunteers of America Minnesota-Wisconsin has found that caregivers with experience want to help others as well. Leveraging volunteer support allows the organization to provide respite services for more caregivers.

Respite Services

Volunteers of America MN-WI offers respite services to provide caregivers a break from their daily caregiving responsibilities and time for self-care. The organization recognizes that many caregivers in the communities they serve see their caregiving role as a family responsibility. As a result, caregivers may not recognize or address the stress and burnout they may experience. For example, one caregiver was experiencing burnout from the daily demands of caring for her mother but was not initially interested in respite or other support services. Volunteers of America MN-WI invited the caregiver to attend a monthly breakfast, where she connected with other caregivers from a similar cultural background. Speaking to other caregivers in her community helped her understand that she could receive respite services without sacrificing her cultural values, and she expressed appreciation for learning that her experiences were common for caregivers.

One-on-One Coaching

For caregivers of individuals with dementia who need more personal and intensive support, Volunteers of America MN-WI offers one-on-one coaching by Caregiver Consultants (*see callout box*). Caregiver Consultants help family caregivers build skills, increase knowledge, and solve problems. Caregiver Consultants meet with caregivers once a week for four to six weeks, and tailor each session based on the unique needs of the caregiver. For example, session topics might include creating personal action plans and offering financial and legal counseling. Caregiver Consultants also facilitate family meetings, as needed, with the primary caregiver and other family members to discuss ways to divide caregiving responsibilities and address challenges.

The Caregiver Consultant Model

Caregiver Consultants are [community health workers](#) hired from the communities they serve, matched to caregivers from their same racial/ethnic background. Volunteers of America MN-WI highlights the importance of having Caregiver Consultants working with individuals from their own communities; ***caregivers are much more likely to trust and open up to others from their own community.*** Caregiver Consultants receive extensive training on working with older adults and their caregivers, including trainings on dementia and on conducting caregiver assessments and working with caregivers and families.

Partnerships with Health Plans

To reach a broader audience of family caregivers, Volunteers of America MN-WI partners with several health plans in the Twin Cities area. Volunteers of America MN-WI attends health plan events and, through the organization's Aging and Memory Mobile Clinic, provides culturally tailored screening and education and referrals for caregivers at these events. The Aging and Memory Mobile clinic is the only mobile unit in the country specifically dedicated to memory screenings for people of color.

Health plan case managers can refer caregivers to Volunteers of America MN-WI's services through a phone and fax line; with consent from caregivers, Volunteers of America MN-WI will reach out to the caregivers directly to offer support services.

Key Considerations to Support Diverse Family Caregivers

Volunteers of America MN-WI's experience supporting diverse family caregivers highlights several key considerations for organizations seeking to support diverse caregivers:

- **Understand the importance of culture in caregiving.** In many cultures—including many communities of color—caring for family members is considered a family responsibility, and frequently caregivers will not identify themselves as caregivers. A provider identifying someone as a “caregiver” may even cause distress or alienation. Volunteers of America MN-WI does not focus on the term “caregiver” and staff explain to caregivers that the term is a way to organize and focus resources. Staff emphasize the resources that are available to individuals and that family members do not need to identify with the term “caregiver.”

When I heard the culturally responsive caregiver support and dementia services [staff] speak at my church, I knew [they] could be trusted.
- Caregiver participant

- **Engage leaders in the community.** Volunteers of America MN-WI engages leaders from the Hmong, East African, and African American communities to ensure their programs are responsive to the community's cultural values. For example, the organization works with a Somali health instructor to train Caregiver Consultants on generational differences in health and health care among East African older adults, and a Hmong medical professional to outreach to Hmong older adults.
- **Recruit individuals from the community to serve the community.** One of the foundational principles of Volunteers of America MN-WI's approach to supporting diverse caregivers is hiring people from the community to serve their own communities. This is vital for families to feel comfortable trusting staff. Volunteers of America MN-WI notes, for example, that the Hmong caregivers participating in the program are more open to sharing with the Hmong Caregiver Consultants working with them than they would be with a community health worker of a different background or who speaks a different language.

Additional Resources on Caregiving

Want to learn more? The [Resources for Integrated Care](#) website includes additional resources for providers and plans supporting diverse family caregivers.

[Involving and Supporting Family Caregivers In Care Planning and Delivery Webinar](#): This webinar provides concrete recommendations for plans and providers on how to best identify, assess, support and engage family caregivers while respecting diverse cultural views.

[Volunteers of America MN-WI Caregiver Help Line- \(952\) 945-4034](#): Volunteers of America MN-WI's helpline offers support for caregivers seeking guidance on caring for an older adult. The helpline has staff who speak English, Somali, Oromo, and Hmong.

The Medicare-Medicaid Coordination Office (MMCO) in the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) seeks to help beneficiaries dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid have access to seamless, high-quality health care that includes the full range of covered services in both programs. This spotlight is intended to support health plans and providers in integrating and coordinating care for dually eligible beneficiaries. It does not convey current or anticipated health plan or provider requirements. For additional information, please go to <https://www.resourcesforintegratedcare.com/>.