



Caregiver Promising Practice Spotlight

Caring Collective

About This Series: The National Caregiver Support Collaborative's (NCSC) Caregiver Promising Practice Spotlights highlight a series of innovative, evidence-informed, and evidence-based practices to effectively support older adult family, kin, and tribal caregivers. The Spotlights provide an overview of the promising practice and suggested actionable steps for organizations to implement the practice.



Featured Promising Practice: Match former and seasoned family caregivers with new family caregivers to provide support through their caregiving journey

Promising Practice Overview

The Penn Memory Center (PMC) at the Penn Neuroscience Center operates Caring Collective, a volunteer-based peer mentorship program for family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD). The program trains and matches seasoned and former family caregivers ("mentors") with new family caregivers ("mentees") to provide guidance and support as they transition into their new role. The PMC developed the program in response to family caregivers' desires to connect with others who could relate to their experiences. Caring Collective aims to reduce feelings of isolation, an effort linked to improved caregiver health, well-being, and financial outcomes.¹

Eligibility and Processes

Mentees eligible to participate in Caring Collective include current family caregivers of patients with ADRD receiving care at the PMC. Eligible mentors are former unpaid/family caregivers for individuals with ADRD who no longer actively provide care or current unpaid/family caregivers who have provided care for five or more years. Caring Collective matches caregivers based on a range of criteria, including similarities in their relationships to their care recipients and the care recipients' dementia type, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of the peer support provided. Mentors may support multiple mentees at a given time.

The program trains mentors to provide emotional support, problem-solving guidance, advice about environmental symptom management, and resources to mentees. Caring Collective connects mentors and mentees for a period of three months and encourages them to arrange six one-hour meetings; duration and frequency of meetings may vary based on participants' availability. These meetings offer an opportunity for both mentors and mentees to benefit from shared experiences and social support. While mentors counsel mentees as they begin their caregiving journey, mentors do not provide medical advice, psychotherapy, or respite.

"Being a mentor in the Caring Collective has reframed my experience as a caregiver, making all that I learned over the years of caring more meaningful, because that knowledge has found usefulness and purpose again by helping another person navigate that difficult path. I feel less empty."

— Caring Collective Mentor

¹ Trualta. (2024). [Caregiver Isolation: The Cost of Loneliness](#).

Why It Works

- Provides new family caregivers with valuable social support and practical advice on navigating their caregiving journey, reducing feelings of isolation, and building confidence in their caregiving skills
- Offers mentors an opportunity to find fulfillment by giving back to the caregiving community and to find meaning in their grief, as applicable

“Caring Collective strives to understand and meet the needs and experiences of our mentees and mentors. Some of the program’s mentees are caring for a loved one who has been recently diagnosed with dementia, while others are caring for someone who is in hospice. The program connects caregivers wherever they are on their caregiving journey.”

— **Meg Kalafsky,**
Associate Director of Social Programs

Implementation Tips

- Develop an eligibility checklist, program application and onboarding processes, and a training process for mentors
- Design process to match mentors and mentees focused on key factors, such as similarities in the caregivers’ relationships to their care recipient and the care recipients’ dementia type
- Structure mentorship interactions (e.g., approximately six one-hour meetings over a three-month period) and connect mentors and mentees to a virtual meeting platform to enable them to easily connect without having to leave home
- Establish forums for mentors and mentees to receive support and provide ongoing feedback, including optional surveys and monthly check-ins for mentees, as well as monthly office hours for mentors to ask role-related questions and build community
- Allow for flexibility in the matching process and consider rematching dyads, if appropriate based on participant feedback, to ensure mentees receive proper support
- Conduct outreach to recruit mentors through features in newsletters, collaboration with clinicians and social workers who could introduce the program to caregivers they support, and communication with previous program mentees to gauge interest in volunteering as a mentor
- Limit program costs and enhance accessibility by leveraging volunteer mentors, establishing a structured cadence for the matching process to promote efficiency, and adopting a virtual format for meetings

Learn More

Recommended Resources:

- [Penn Memory Center – Caring Collective](#)
- [Caring Collective Mentor Panel](#)

Contact:

For more information on supporting older adult family, kin, and tribal caregivers, please contact the NCSC by e-mail (caregivercollaborative@acl.hhs.gov).

Access other Promising Practice Spotlights in this series on the [NCSC website](#).