

# Meeting the Behavioral Health Needs of Older Veterans and their Caregivers

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Webinar  
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**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

# Welcome



Donna Aligata, R.N.C.

Project Director

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF)

Technical Assistance Center  
Policy Research Associates, Inc.

- Since 2008, SAMHSA has partnered with states and territories to strengthen behavioral health systems serving service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF) through its SMVF Technical Assistance (TA) Center
- SAMHSA leads efforts to ensure substance use and mental health issues among all Americans, including SMVF, are well understood





- Strengthening ongoing collaboration among state/territory-level military and civilian stakeholders
- Providing a centralized mechanism for states and territories to learn, connect, and share
- Increasing awareness of and access to resources and programs that strengthen behavioral health care systems for SMVF
- Supporting coordinated responses to the behavioral health needs of SMVF
- Encouraging states and territories to implement promising-, best- and evidence-based practices



The SMVF TA Center provides training and technical assistance through activities such as:

- Policy Academies
- Implementation Academies
- Webinars
- Learning communities
- Onsite and virtual expert consultation
- Resource dissemination



# Webinar Objectives

- Provide an overview of the behavioral health needs of aging veterans, including unique characteristics and risk factors
- Discuss the roles and specialized needs of caregivers of aging veterans
- Describe some of the leading initiatives that have been implemented to support aging veterans and their caregivers
- Identify available training and resources that communities can use to support caregivers of aging veterans in their community





# Why this Webinar is Important

- More than 50 percent of veterans are aged 60 or older
- Older veterans with behavioral health needs have not received as much attention, despite a higher risk for mental disorders



# Why this Webinar is Important (cont'd)

## Aging Veterans may:

- Face a high risk for social isolation which can lead to depression, anxiety, and suicide
- Experience psychic wounds that re-emerge as they age
- Rely heavily on family, caregivers, and community



# Treatment, Peer, and Recovery Support Works

- Older veterans and their caregivers need:
  - Increased, coordinated efforts
  - Healthcare systems that integrate physical and behavioral health help
- Homebased care is a beneficial resource



# The VA Cannot Do It Alone

- Limited eligibility
- Distance
- Many want to get healthcare and help locally



# What is Needed?

- Outreach to older veterans
- Increased support and community provider training
- Enhanced family and caregiver support
- Expanded peer support
- Thank and honor older veterans for their sacrifice and reassure them that we will all be there for them!





Meg Kabat L.C.S.W.-C., C.C.M.  
National Director,  
Caregiver Support Program  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

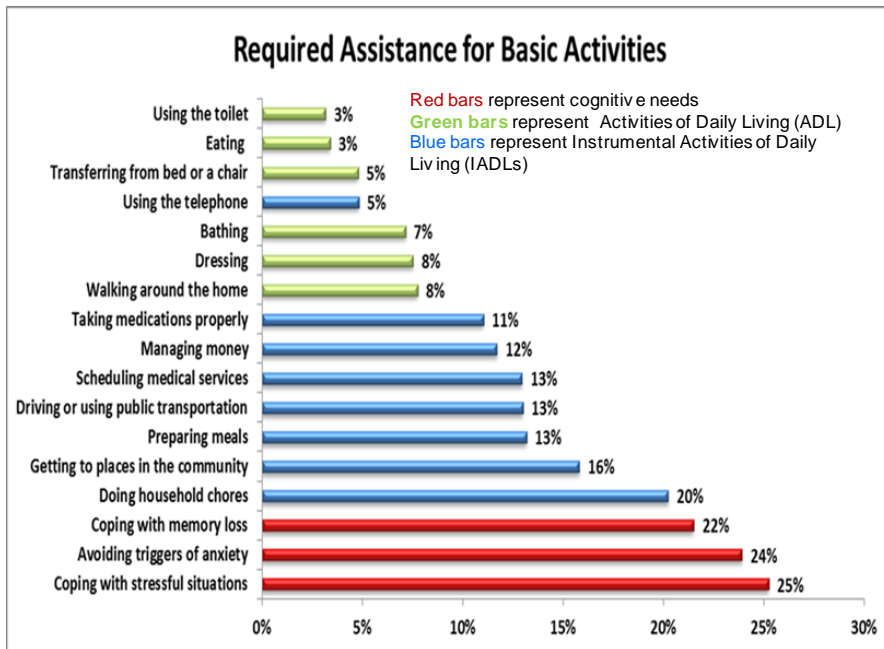
# **VA Caregiver Support Program**

## Department of Veterans Affairs

**Meg Kabat, LCSW-C, CCM**  
**National Director, VA Caregiver Support Program**  
**Care Management & Social Work**



# Caregiving Needs in the Veteran Population

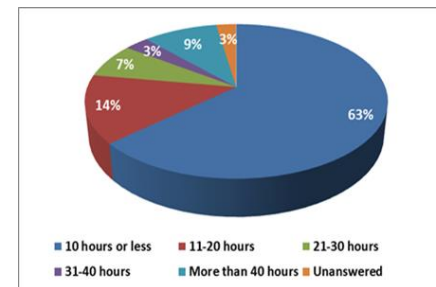


Of the estimated **2.4 million enrollees** (27%) receiving any assistance with daily living activities, most (**63%**) receive **10 hours or less assistance per week**.

Source: 2016 Survey of Enrollees

### Who is caring for enrolled Veterans? (n=2,385,358)

Spouse	59%
Adult Child	26%
Friend or Neighbor	20%
Brother or Sister	10%
Parent	9%







# Menu of VA Services to Support Families

## **In-Home Care**

- Skilled Nursing
- Home Health Aide
- Home Based Primary Care
- Veteran Directed Home & Community Based Care

## **Respite Care**

### **Services to Address Mobility**

- Equipment
- Home Modification
- Automobile Modification

### **Education and Training**

### **Financial Support**

- Aid and Attendance
- Caregiver Stipend (Post 9-11)

### **Information and Referral**

- Caregiver Web site: [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)
- Caregiver Support Line: **1-855-260-3274**

## **Caregiver Support**

- Caregiver Support Coordinators
- Peer Support Mentoring Program
- Building Better Caregivers™
- Spouse Telephone Support
- REACH VA
- Support Groups





# Caregiver Support Coordinators (CSC)

- Located at each VA medical center
- Clinical experts on caregiver issues about VA and non-VA resources
- Organize caregiver focused activities and services
  - National Family Caregivers Month (November)
- Ensure caregiver sensitivity is integrated into all programs
- Provide National Caregiver Support Line follow-up





# Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program Overview

- Clinical program, providing the following additional services to family caregivers of eligible Veterans injured in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001:
  - Stipend
  - Enrollment in CHAMPVA
  - Mental Health
  - Beneficiary Travel
  - Education and Training
  - Additional respite
- Program participation **must**:
  - Be in the clinical best interest of the Veteran
  - Support the Veteran's progress in treatment
- 22,000 Veterans currently participating





# Program of General Caregiver Support Services

## Program Overview

- Clinical program, providing the following services to caregivers of Veterans enrolled in VA health care, regardless of era of service or reason for requiring a caregiver:
  - Training and Education
  - Diagnosis Specific Programs for Caregivers
  - Caregiver Support Line
  - Caregiver Support Program Website
  - Email Listserv





# VA Caregiver Support Program Caregiver Training and Education Programs

**Caregiver Self Care Courses** In person classroom trainings provided to caregivers, focused on supporting and meeting the needs of caregivers. Classes are led by trained facilitators and are offered in English and Spanish. Topics include:

- Managing Stress
- Problem Solving & Effective Communication
- Taking Care of Yourself
- Utilizing Technology

**Caregiver Education Calls** VA's National Caregiver Support Line offers monthly telephone education calls for caregivers with a theme of "Care for the Caregiver." The topics change monthly.

**Peer Support Mentoring** Peer Support Mentoring was developed to strengthen relationships between caregivers of all era's; to provide an opportunity for networking, and to empower caregivers to help one another. Peer Support Mentors receive training and support prior to being matched with mentees.



# VA Caregiver Support Program Caregiver Training and Education Programs

**Resources for Enhancing all Caregivers Health (REACH VA)** REACH VA is an evidence- based education, skills building, and support intervention for caregivers of Veterans with dementia, spinal cord injury/disorders, MS, PTSD, and ALS.

- 4 sessions with the caregiver over a 2-3 month timeframe, in person and over telephone
- Core skills taught to the caregiver include problem solving, positive thinking, mood management, and stress reduction

**Caregiver Telephone Support** Caregiver Telephone Support is an intervention provided to caregivers via a telephone support group. The following Telephone Support Groups are available at medical centers across the country, depending on local interest:

- Caregivers of All Eras
- Spouses of Post 9/11 Veterans
- Dementia
- Spinal Cord Injury /Disorders
- ALS
- MS
- PTSD



# VA Caregiver Support Program Caregiver Training and Education Programs

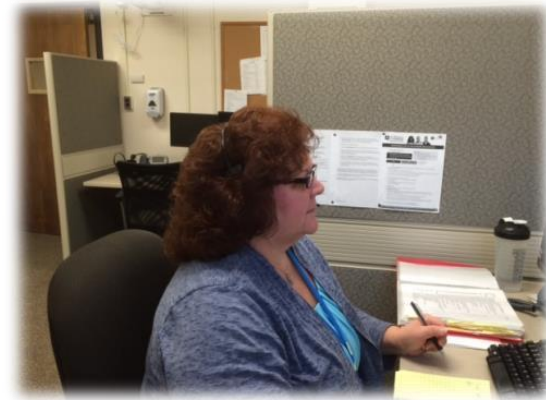
## **Building Better Caregivers™**

- An interactive, web based workshop developed by Stanford University and provided in partnership with the National Council on Aging (NCoA)
- Equips caregivers with the knowledge, skills, and support to boost their self-confidence in maintaining and leading active, fulfilling lives
- 6-week workshop composed of 20-25 caregivers, moderated by 2 trained facilitators
- Topics include managing difficult behaviors and emotions, reducing stress, self-care methods to improve health, making decisions, finding additional help and resources, and planning for the future
- Weekly activities include reading and applying new knowledge; making and posting a weekly action plan, brainstorming, problem solving, and celebrating milestones with fellow participants via bulletin boards; and participating in self-tests and activities
- Participant satisfaction averages 4.5 on a 5-point Likert scale



## VA Caregiver Support Line - 1-855-260-3274

- Located in Canandaigua, NY
- Over 320,000 calls received
- Averaging over 200 calls per day
- Staffed by licensed social workers
- Follow-up provided by local CSC
- Consistently positive comments and appreciation from caregivers







# Caregiver Web Site – www.caregiver.va.gov

- Provides zip code based interactive Caregiver Support Coordinator locator
- Contact information for the Caregiver Support Line
- “Caregiver Toolbox”
- Caregiver “connections” with stories from peer caregivers
- Link to application for the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers
- Videos of family caregivers and Veterans
- Averaging over 2,000 hits per day

**VA Caregiver Support**

**Help at your Fingertips**  
Call VA's Caregiver Support Line to access services or a local coordinator: 1-855-260-3274.  
[Learn more »](#)

Peer Support Mentoring   Caregiver Support Line   NFCM

**Support for Caregivers**  
Caregivers play an important role in the health and well-being of Veterans. The Caregiver Support Program offers training, educational resources, and multiple tools to help you succeed. Please contact our Caregiver Support Line for advice on being a caregiver.

**Care for Caregivers**

- Caregiver Support Line
- Peer Support Mentoring
- Building Better Caregivers
- Caring for Post-9/11 Veterans

[More](#)

**Care for Veterans**

- Adult Day Health Care Centers
- Home-Based Primary Care
- Skilled Home Care
- Homemaker & Home Health Aides

[More](#)

**NEED HELP?**

**Caregiver Support**  
855-260-3274

**FIND YOUR CAREGIVER SUPPORT COORDINATOR**

**CARING FOR A SERIOUSLY INJURED POST-9/11 VETERAN**



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Director, Virginia Veteran and Family Support, Virginia  
Department of Veterans Services



# Serving the Needs of Older Veterans and their Caregivers

Carol H. Berg

Interim Director, Virginia Veterans and Family Support

# Trends Among Aging Veterans

- High rates of behavioral health conditions such as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Anxiety and depression
- Undiagnosed incidences of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Cancer related conditions – Vietnam War – Agent Orange

# Trends Among Aging Veterans (cont'd)

- Respiratory conditions – First Gulf War – burn pits
- Substance abuse – alcohol and drugs
- Physical impairments
- Non-service related conditions such as diabetes, dementia, or advanced arthritis

# What Determines What Resources are Available?

- The eligibility of the veteran (e.g. VA resources versus community resources)
- The resources available within the community
- The income of the veteran or financial resources available from external sources (e.g. family, etc.)

# Community Resources for Veterans

- Veteran Support Groups
  - VA Medical Center/Vet Centers
  - State Department of Veteran Services (if available)
- Veteran Services Organizations
  - Disabled American Veterans
  - Veterans of Foreign Wars
  - American Legion



# Community Resources for Veterans

- Community Programs for Seniors
- Community Clubhouse or Day Programs
- Retired Senior Volunteer Program
- Behavioral Health Resources
- AARP Programs

# Community Resources for Caregivers

- Community Agency on Aging or Senior Services
- Eldercare locator services [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)
- Companionship Services
- Home care aides

# Community Resources for Caregivers

- Senior Centers
- Faith communities
- Disease specific organizations
- Caregiver Support Groups

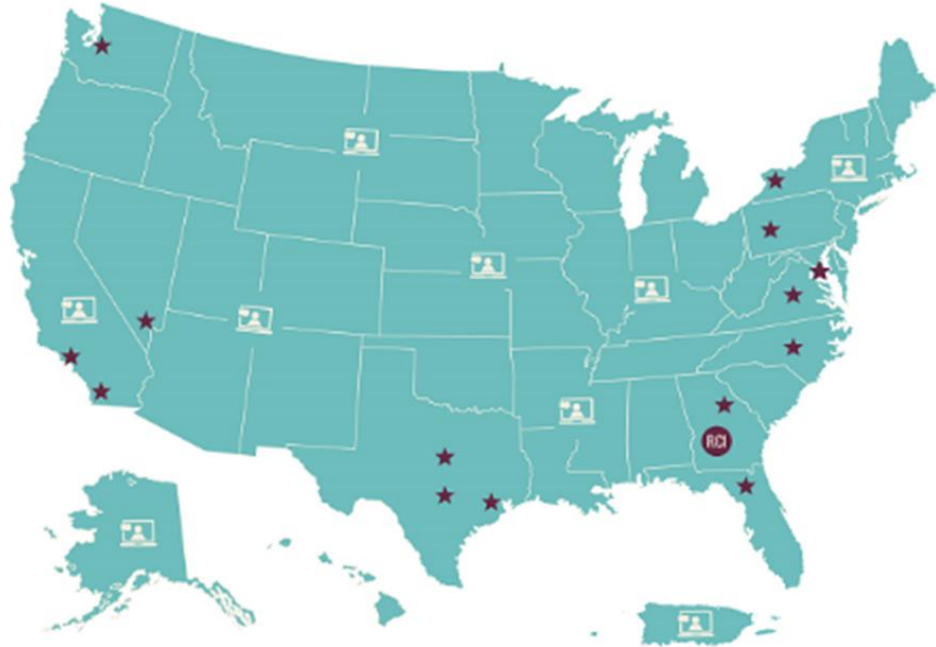
# Operation Family Caregiver



### Expansion based on military caregiver populations

#### **Nationwide access**

Operation Family Caregiver can be delivered in person in the physical locations listed below or to caregivers anywhere in the United States via Skype. Complete and send the referral form to our national office, or contact one of these sites to learn more about how Operation Family Caregiver might help you. Reaching out is a sign of strength.



# Operation Family Caregiver (cont'd)

Operation Family Caregiver (OCF) coaches the families of newly returning service members and veterans to manage the difficulties they face when they come home.

OFC is a personalized program, tailored specifically to the struggles of each family.

The program teaches military families how best to navigate their challenges, resulting in stronger and healthier families.

[www.operationfamilycaregiver.org](http://www.operationfamilycaregiver.org)



# Tips for Veteran Caregivers

- It's important for caregivers to:
  - Learn to recognize the signs of stress and burnout
  - Understand how individual caregiver “hot buttons” impact your own stress

# Tips for Veteran Caregivers (cont'd)

- Embrace their own emotions and celebrate what they can do instead of what they can't do
- Self-care should always be a priority and part of a caregiver's daily routine
- Know their own stress outlets and how they can relieve stress



# Tips for Veteran Caregivers (cont'd)

- It's also important for caregivers to:
  - Connect with the own supports (e.g. family, friends, or professionals)
  - Set their own schedule with activities - it is “ok to say no” - even the caregiver can't “do it all”

# Tips for Veteran Caregivers (cont'd)

- Keep it simple and take it slow
- Ask for help when it's needed - family, friends, or professional help can make a huge difference
- Learn about the resources available to veteran caregivers through their state Department of Veterans Services

# Resources

- AARP Caregiver Resource Guide: [www.aarp.org/caregiving](http://www.aarp.org/caregiving)
- ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center: [www.archrespite.org](http://www.archrespite.org)
- Hidden Heroes – Elizabeth Dole Foundation: <https://hiddenheroes.org/>
- Well Spouse Association: [www.wellspouse.org](http://www.wellspouse.org)
- Family Caregiver Alliance: [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)
- Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving: [www.rosalynncarter.org](http://www.rosalynncarter.org)

# Tips for Veteran Caregivers (cont'd)

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# For Technical Assistance Questions, Please Contact

SAMHSA's Service Members, Veterans, and  
their Families Technical Assistance Center

345 Delaware Avenue

Delmar, NY 12054

Phone: 518-439-7415, ext. 5270

Email: [smvftacenter@prainc.com](mailto:smvftacenter@prainc.com)

# Thank You

SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) • 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)