Overview

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law: 111-163) enacted legislation to ensure training, services, and assistance for family caregivers of Veterans through two landmark programs: The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and the Program of General Caregiver Support Services. These programs enhance support and services for family caregivers, including training and education and respite care among other services. Uptake of the Comprehensive Assistance Program has far surpassed initial projections with more than 50,000 applicants at a cost of more than $400 million in FY15. The VA-CARES Evaluation Initiative will evaluate the impacts of these programs on Veterans and caregivers.

The VA Caregiver Support Program Partnered Evaluation (VA-CARES) Initiative evaluated the short-term impacts of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers and the Program of General Caregiver Support Services by addressing the following aims:

• Assess the impact of the Comprehensive Program on health and well-being of Veterans by examining healthcare encounters expected to be sensitive to caregiver support (acute, primary, and specialty utilization);
• Assess the impacts of the Comprehensive Program on the health and well-being of primary family caregivers;
• Understand how caregivers use and value components of both the Comprehensive Program and the Program of General Caregiver Support Services; and
• Generate a detailed profile of the costs and services provided in both programs in order to assess the value of the program to Veterans, caregivers, and the VA healthcare system.

Results from this comprehensive evaluation will help inform the VA Caregiver Support Program (CSP) about its return on investment and will provide information on best practices for improving and targeting its interventions.
The VA Caregiver Support (VA-CARES) Program Partnered Evaluation Extension will address the following aims:

- Examine the effect of VA Comprehensive Program participation on Veterans’ total healthcare costs at three years;
- Conduct formative evaluation of the Comprehensive Program application process to identify areas and approaches for supporting consistency across VA; and
- Characterize and examine the status of caregivers who were recommended for an intervention based on their Zarit Burden Score—a measure of stress and strain for caregivers.

The extension also will conduct additional analysis based on data collected during the first phase of the VA CARES Initiative.

**Implementation Strategy**

The results of the evaluation will contribute to the implementation of evidence-based treatments or programs designed to improve quality of care for Veterans. Through an intensive communication plan with the Caregiver Support Program, the findings of the evaluation will be used to strengthen the Caregiver Support Program.

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**Operational Partner**
The Caregiver Support Program Office, part of VA Care Management and Social Work Services, strives to help those who partner with VA to care for people who have ‘borne the battle’ through specific programs and a support line that offers emotional support and resources to family members and friends, who care for Veterans on a daily basis.

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