



San Diego Caregiver Connections

Program Overview & Evaluation



DeterminedHealthSM



Background

In California, nearly 5 million unpaid family and friend caregivers provide essential support to their loved ones, often without sufficient training or resources. Of these caregivers, approximately 1.7 million are caring for individuals with Alzheimer's Disease or dementia, facing significant challenges due to the lack of adequate support.

California is also projected to face a labor shortage of up to 3.2 million direct care workers, exacerbated by low retention rates and limited training opportunities.¹ This shortage threatens the quality of care available to those in need.

In 2022, Collaborative Consulting surveyed 600 direct care workers and family caregivers to understand their experiences and challenges.² The survey revealed several common themes, shedding light on the urgent need for improved support and training in this critical sector:

- Direct care workers often struggle to find time for training due to their demanding schedules, which limits their access to necessary training programs.
- The financial burden of training frequently falls on direct care workers, discouraging their participation in these programs.
- Many workers reported that available training is of low quality and lacks follow-up, which reduces their ability to apply and retain the knowledge gained.

Program Overview

With support from two state grants, [CalGrows](#) and [Caring4Cal](#), the San Diego State University Center for Excellence in Aging & Longevity (CEAL) launched the San Diego Caregiver Connections (SDCC) program. This initiative is dedicated to supporting both unpaid caregivers and the paid direct care workforce by providing essential resources and training to ensure high-quality care.

The primary goal of the SDCC program is to increase and diversify the direct care workforce through comprehensive, accessible, competency-based training and employability support. By creating clear career pathways, the program seeks to enhance job satisfaction and retention. Additionally, the SDCC program provides essential support to friend and family caregivers through peer support networks, improving their skills and well-being, and fostering a sense of community. This internal evaluation was designed to analyze the program's impact and overall effectiveness by reviewing the following objectives:

- **Increase and Diversify the Direct Care Workforce**
- **Improve Caregiver Knowledge and Skills**
- **Support Caregivers Through Peer Support**

Additionally, this evaluation aimed to identify areas for improvement to better meet the needs of caregivers and improve overall program outcomes.

¹https://cdn-west-prod-chhs-01.dsh.ca.gov/chhs/uploads/2020/05/MPA-LTSS-Subcommittee-Report_FINAL-May-2020.pdf
²<https://aging.ca.gov/download.ashx?lE0rcNUV0zbwEjzcaeUlw%3D%3D>

Program Partners

[County of San Diego IHSS Public Authority](#) provided in-person training opportunities for caregivers and established a clear pathway for referring program participants to become In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) caregivers.

[Determined Health](#) provided subject matter expertise in geriatric medicine, dementia care, community health, care transformation, and human-centered design. To enhance participant engagement, Determined Health developed an online registration system for training enrollment and assisted with recruiting participants for the program.

[George G. Glenner Alzheimer's Family Centers, Inc.](#) lent their expertise in adult day care programs, family support, case management, and dementia care training. They referred direct care workers and family caregivers to relevant training courses and delivered specialized dementia care training both online and in person.

[Grossmont Healthcare District](#) focused on marketing the program, particularly in rural areas and among students interested in the healthcare field. They helped raise awareness about training opportunities and career pathways, including a career fair for high school students, ensuring that diverse and underserved communities had access to the resources needed to enter the healthcare workforce.

[Stepping Higher, Inc.](#) focused on building trust and leading targeted outreach efforts within BIPOC, low socioeconomic, and underrepresented communities to boost participation in caregiving training courses. They assisted participants with course registration and disseminated marketing materials through various channels, including email, social media, press releases, newsletters, and presentations.

[United Women of East Africa](#) promoted the program to the refugee community, successfully engaging over 250 individuals in participation. They facilitated in-person training in four different languages and provided career support to enhance opportunities in the caregiving field. Additionally, they collaborated on an [issue brief](#) aimed at strengthening the caregiver workforce through refugee partnerships, highlighting the unique needs and contributions of this demographic within the caregiving landscape.

Program Description

In July 2023, CEAL introduced the SDCC initiative. At the heart of this program is an extensive curriculum comprising over 80 hours of online, self-paced training courses, designed to accommodate various levels of caregiving expertise through the following multiple specialized tracks:

Introduction to Caregiving for Older Adults covers the essential skills and knowledge needed to excel as a caregiver. Topics include mastering the fundamentals of care, managing stress, creating a clean and healthy environment, understanding nutrition, recognizing burnout, and

effective communication. These courses address the unique challenges of working with an aging population.

Advanced Training for Compassionate Caregivers is designed for those seeking culturally competent and sensitive care skills, including topics such as providing homecare to LGBT older adults, recognizing and overcoming barriers to care, understanding anxiety and mental illness, and managing the unique challenges of caring for older adults with hoarding disorder.

Caring with Confidence - Essential Skills for Safety and Observation equip caregivers with vital skills and knowledge to ensure the safety and well-being of those under their care. Caregivers learn about the significance of vital signs in monitoring health, providing support with medication self-administration, safety precautions for fall prevention, and understanding body systems for a holistic approach to health. Additionally, a module on emergency procedures ensures caregivers are well-prepared for any situation.

Navigating End-of-Life Care delves into the complexities of end-of-life care, helping caregivers understand their own attitudes towards death and dying, and providing better support to clients nearing the end of life. The course also addresses the emotional experiences of older adults at the end of life, offers recommendations for supporting family members, and provides coping skills to manage stress, burnout, and trauma associated with caregiving.

Dementia Training provides caregivers with practical strategies for managing dementia care effectively. Caregivers learn problem-solving techniques to address common challenges faced by dementia patients, enhancing their ability to manage real-world scenarios. The training also covers methods to identify and nurture the retained skills and interests of individuals with dementia, creating a supportive and enriching environment for both the caregiver and the care recipient.

Our courses are available in English and Spanish, with subtitles provided for most sessions in Russian, Vietnamese, Hindi, and Korean. Drawing on our experience with refugee populations, we are committed to offering additional inclusive training opportunities in-person with translation services. This holistic approach ensures that all participants are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to deliver culturally sensitive and effective care to diverse groups.

While training is essential, the value of incorporating a peer support program cannot be overstated. A robust network of peers who share similar experiences is vital for offering emotional support, practical advice based on shared lessons, problem-solving strategies, and access to essential resources. Peer support helps caregivers feel less isolated, fosters a sense of community, and provides ongoing encouragement and guidance. This component is crucial for enhancing overall well-being and effectiveness, enabling caregivers to deliver better care while finding personal fulfillment in their roles. CEAL developed an [issue brief](#) which includes a framework for caregiver support to build effective peer support networks. This framework integrates evidence-based practices into caregiver support programs and encourages the exchange of ideas across different peer support domains.

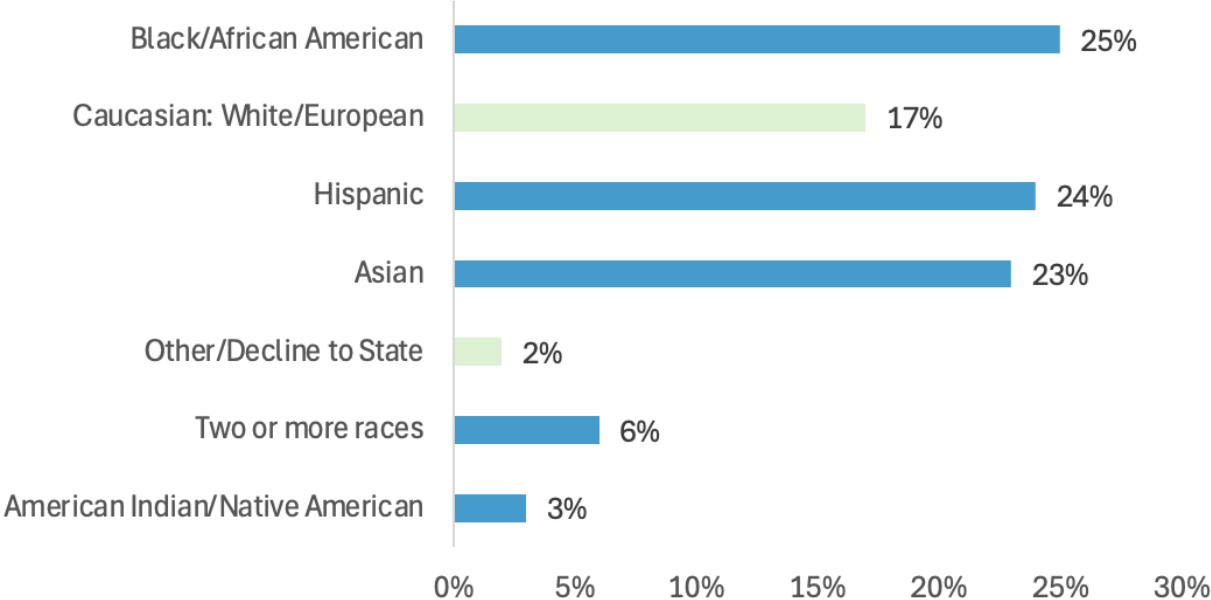
In addition to training and peer support, establishing clear career pathways is essential for fostering professional growth within the caregiving field. Providing caregivers with opportunities to advance into other healthcare roles—such as Registered Nurse (RN) or Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)—not only enhances their skill set but also motivates them to pursue further education and certifications. By showcasing available pathways and resources for career advancement, the program can empower caregivers to excel in their current roles while exploring new possibilities within the healthcare sector. This focus on upward mobility not only benefits the individual caregivers but also helps to address the broader workforce shortage by encouraging the development of a more skilled and dedicated healthcare workforce.

This innovative and cost-effective model is grounded in a commitment to inclusivity, actively reaching out to diverse, low-income, multilingual, and under-resourced communities who often lack access to training resources, language options, technology, soft skills, and educational opportunities. The SDCC model aims to create equitable access to training and career advancement, ensuring that all caregivers have the tools they need to succeed in their roles.

Participants

In its inaugural year, the SDCC program initially aimed to recruit around 650 participants. However, between July 2023 and July 2024, the program far surpassed this goal, enrolling a total of 6,247 individuals, exceeding expectations by over 800%. Participants collectively completed 60,270 hours of training, highlighting the program's significant impact and reach within the caregiving community.

The demographic breakdown of participants underscores the program's commitment to diversity and inclusivity. A substantial 81% of participants identified as people of color, highlighting SDCC's effective outreach to diverse communities.



A quarter (25%) of the participants were multilingual, indicating the program's effectiveness in attracting individuals who can provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care.

While most participants identified as paid direct care workers (58%), friend and family caregivers made up 42% of participants. Among these friend and family caregivers, nearly half (48%) expressed an interest in pursuing a paid position in the caregiving field.

The collaborative efforts with community organizations and stakeholders have been instrumental in extending the program's reach, ensuring that a broad spectrum of caregivers from various backgrounds can access and benefit from the resources and training provided. This partnership-driven approach not only enhances the program's inclusivity but also strengthens the overall impact and sustainability of the caregiver support network.

Methodology and Data Sources

The findings are based on a synthesis of various data sources collected between December 2023 and August 2024. The primary data collection methods included pre- and post-surveys administered to participants. A total of 1,184 surveys were collected, with 42% of responses from unpaid caregivers and 58% from paid direct care workers. These surveys assessed how the training contributed to the development of competencies among caregivers and measured their preparedness for handling responsibilities after participating in the program.

In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with 45 individuals who engaged in peer support for a minimum of four weeks and completed more than 30 hours of training.

Key Findings

These findings underscore the positive impact of the training program on caregiver competencies and preparedness, highlighting its effectiveness in equipping participants to meet the demands of their caregiving roles.

- A significant percentage of participants (91%) reported improvements in their caregiving skills and knowledge, with many indicating that the training enhanced their ability to provide high-quality care. Specific areas of competency development included communication, problem-solving, and understanding the needs of care recipients.
- A majority of respondents (86%) felt more prepared to handle their caregiving responsibilities after completing the training. Many participants expressed increased confidence in their ability to manage care-related challenges, contributing to a greater sense of competence in their roles.
- Overall satisfaction with the training program was high among both friend and family caregivers (83%) and paid direct care workers (81%). Participants valued the relevance of the training content and the effectiveness of the teaching methods.
- Participants reported a significant increase in their preparedness to handle caregiving responsibilities after completing the training. Before the training, the average

preparedness score was 4 out of 10. After completing the training, the average score rose to 8 out of 10.

- Participants rated the importance of the peer support program in providing the necessary support as caregivers with an average score of 4.6 on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "not important at all" and 5 being "extremely important").
- All participants identified at least one benefit of engaging in peer support, including the opportunity to share experiences (80%), access to resources and advice (76%), and alleviating feelings of isolation (79%).
- 100% of participants expressed that they would recommend the peer support program to other caregivers.

The following findings identify areas for improvement that could further enhance the SDCC program:

- Nearly a quarter (24%) found it challenging to balance caregiving responsibilities with participation in peer support activities, highlighting a need for flexible scheduling or alternative participation formats to accommodate their availability.
- Participants suggested additional topics or resources that could further enhance their learning experience including requests for more advanced training modules (29%), additional support for disease-specific caregiving challenges (18%), and hands-on training (14%).
- Some participants (12%) expressed interest in exploring career pathways within the direct care field.

Conclusion

Through its comprehensive training model, the SDCC program has demonstrated remarkable success in not only exceeding initial enrollment goals but also in fostering a diverse and skilled caregiver workforce. By collaborating with key partners and leveraging community resources, the program effectively reached underserved populations and provided essential training and peer support. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants underscores the program's impact, with 91% reporting improvements in their caregiving skills and knowledge, and 86% feeling more prepared to handle their responsibilities.

While the program has made significant strides, there remain areas for improvement, particularly in offering flexible participation options and addressing the expressed interest in career pathways. The insights gathered from participants will guide ongoing enhancements to ensure that the SDCC program continues to meet the evolving needs of caregivers.

In conclusion, the SDCC program is not only equipping caregivers with the knowledge and skills needed for effective care but also nurturing a sense of community and support that is crucial for their well-being. By fostering an environment of inclusivity and providing clear career pathways, the program is poised to contribute significantly to the resilience of the caregiving workforce in California, ultimately enhancing the quality of care for those who depend on it.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Section 1: Overview

- Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is _____ and I appreciate you taking the time to share your perspective on the San Diego Caregiver Connections training and peer support program.
- This interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes.
- Your participation is voluntary, and responses, including quotes used in our evaluation, will be anonymous.
- You do not have to answer every question.

Before we begin, do you give your verbal consent to participate?

Section 2: Introduction

1. Are you an unpaid or paid caregiver?
2. How long have you been a caregiver?
3. How did you learn about San Diego Caregiver Connections training and peer support program?

Section 3: Training Impact

4. How many hours of training did you complete?
5. Before completing the training, how prepared did you feel to handle your caregiver responsibilities? Please rate your preparedness on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not prepared at all and 10 being extremely prepared.
6. After completing the training, how prepared do you feel to handle your caregiver responsibilities now? Please rate your preparedness on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not prepared at all and 10 being extremely prepared.
7. Do you have any examples on how you have applied skills or knowledge to help with your caregiving responsibilities?

8. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being poor, 2 being fair, 3 being good, 4 being very good, and 5 being excellent), how would you rate the quality of the training you received?

Section 4: Peer Support Experience

9. How often did you participate in peer support sessions?
10. Can you describe your experience with the peer support program?
11. What benefits did you experience from participating in peer support?
12. Did you encounter any challenges while participating in peer support?
13. In what ways did peer support enhance your confidence and effectiveness as a caregiver?
14. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not important at all and 5 being extremely important), how important was the peer support program in providing you with the support you needed as a caregiver?

Section 5: Overall Program Feedback

15. Which class or session did you find most valuable in your caregiver training?
16. Are there any areas where you believe the program could improve?
17. Would you recommend this program to other caregivers? Why or why not?
18. Do you have any suggestions for future training topics or peer support activities?

Section 6: Conclusion

19. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in the caregiver training or peer support program?

Thank you again for sharing your insights. Your feedback will help us improve the program for future participants.