



# Caregiver Support Quarterly Newsletter

## Peer Support Mentoring Program

The Caregiver Peer Support Mentoring Program is available for caregivers of all Veterans. The program was developed to strengthen relationships between caregivers, to provide an opportunity for networking and to empower caregivers to help one another.

### Why Become a Peer Mentor?

Mentoring creates a trusting and helpful relationship between two people. Peer Mentors provide personal support to their Mentees, assist with the navigation of daily stressors and serve as role models for individuals who need help.

### Benefits of Serving as a Peer Mentor

- Share tips about caregiving that you've learned through your own experience
- Share your experience & knowledge of resources such as VA benefits, the VA healthcare team & community agencies that can provide needed assistance
- Provide an outlet for socializing and networking
- Help caregivers build life skills to deal with adversity in the future

### Why Work with a Peer Mentor?

Because there are many challenges to being a caregiver, it can be helpful for you to talk with someone who has "been there" and understands the pressures that come with being a caregiver.

### Benefits of Having a Peer Mentor

- Create an outlet for socializing and networking
- Learn from the experience and support of those who understand the challenges caregivers face
- Receive support from someone who has "been there"

### Eligibility Criteria/Becoming a Peer Mentor

Caregivers of Veterans of all eras are eligible to participate in the VA Caregiver Peer Support Mentoring Program, both as Mentors and as Mentees.

- Register as a Volunteer & receive orientation in the Voluntary Services Program at your VA Medical Center (VAMC).
- Complete the orientation to the Peer Support Mentoring Program.
- Be matched with another caregiver.
- Mentors are required to participate in training before assigned a Mentee.
- Background and fingerprint checks are required for Mentors through the local VAMC Voluntary Services Department.

The Peer Mentoring Program is currently recruiting Caregivers to serve as peer mentors. If interested in volunteering, please contact the Fargo VA CSP.

Source: [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)

## ONGOING EVENTS

### Caregiver Support Groups

Fargo VA offers monthly caregiver support groups both virtually and in-person. Caregivers can connect with others and share both the challenges and successes experienced throughout the caregiving journey.

**When:** 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of every month

**Time:** 5:30 – 7:00 pm

**Location:** Virtual format

**When:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of every month

**Time:** 10:30 am – 12:00 pm

**Location:** Fergus Falls Library

**When:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of every month

**Time:** 1:00 – 2:30 pm

**Location:** Virtual format

To register, obtain dial in/log in information, or to ask questions please contact:

Caregiver Support Program:

(701) 239-3700 ext. 4399

[vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov](mailto:vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov)



## April is Parkinson's Disease Awareness Month

### What Does My Veteran's Diagnosis Mean for Me?

It is possible to live well with Parkinson's Disease (PD) despite the physical and/or cognitive changes that come with the disease progression. PD is often considered a family disease because of the effect it may have on the person's family and friends. Being a Caregiver is an important role and most often performed by the spouse or an adult child. In the early & middle stages of the disease, the role is often described as a partnership. The Caregiver and the person with PD have a dynamic relationship as both adjust to sharing duties and working together. In the later stages of the disease, caring for someone with PD may become physically and emotionally draining. It is important for Caregivers to remember that it is okay to ask for help and to acknowledge that one person cannot do it alone. Caregivers often feel empowered and supported by staying engaged in social activities, building a strong backup team, and attending support groups.

### Caregiving Tips:

- Educate yourself and find a good doctor: Keep up-to-date on your loved one's disease and do not be afraid to ask questions at doctor visits. This helps you better understand what is happening to your loved one. Bring an updated list of medications to all doctor appointments. Consider finding a neurologist who specializes in movement disorder.
- Hospitalization and PD: Being hospitalized can be stressful for both the Veteran with PD and the Caregiver. Often, it becomes the Caregiver's responsibility to educate hospital staff on the importance of the medication schedule and ensuring the Veteran is receiving his/her medications on time, as they may not be knowledgeable about PD management & treatment. Contact the Veteran's movement disorder specialist or neurologist to make them aware of the hospitalization and ask him/her to contact the hospital neurologist to discuss the treatment plan.
- Take care of yourself: Address your own medical needs, eat well, exercise, sleep and take time for yourself. It is important to maintain your health so you can continue to provide the best care. Do not allow the disease to become you or the center of your life. Maintain a healthy social life & hobbies you had before you became a Caregiver.
- Be realistic and access help: Know what you can do and recognize when you have given all that you can. Access resources such as home health care, respite, adult day health care, nursing home, etc. If family members or friends offer to help, let them, and be specific in ways they can help.
- Depression: Be aware of the signs and symptoms of depression for both you and the Veteran and do not delay in seeking support or professional counseling.
- Breathe/meditate: Try yoga, tai chi or deep breathing. These exercises will help slow your heart rate and calm your emotional state which will help you think more clearly and feel refreshed.
- Emotional support: Consider attending a support group where you can share your concerns and feelings and talk with other Caregivers. This can help reduce any feelings of being alone. Support groups offer mutual support as well as valuable information on PD.
- Positive thinking and humor: Think "I can do this!" Laughing is a great stress reliever.
- Long term care planning: It is important to explore future plans such as advance directives, living wills and care at home versus nursing home placement, etc. Be sure to discuss these issues and decisions with loved ones to ensure the Veteran's wishes are followed.

*Source: [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)*

### Resources:

- The Parkinson's Foundation has a Minnesota & Dakotas Chapter and offers a variety of wellness activities, along with support groups. For updated information on resources offered, please call them at 763-317-1304 or visit the website ([www.parkinsons.org](http://www.parkinsons.org)).
- The Fargo VA Caregiver Support Program will be offering a virtual REACH VA Parkinson's group which will meet on April 9, 16, 23, & 30, 2024. This series will focus on self-care, mood management, and problem solving for Caregivers of Veterans with Parkinson's Disease.

## Caregiver Book Club

Book club provides an opportunity for Caregivers to share their love of reading with one another. Please join us for lively discussion via a virtual format!

Our Caregivers' upcoming selections are as follows:

### February:

*Breakfast with Buddha*

By Roland Merullo

### March:

*Hatchet*

by Gary Paulsen

### April:

*How the Word is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America*

by Clint Smith

### May:

*Mad Honey*

by Jodi Picoult & Jennifer Finney Boylan

**When:** the first Thursday of the month

**Time:** 3:00-4:00 PM CST

To register, obtain the virtual link, or for any questions, please contact us at:

Caregiver Support Program  
701-239-3700 ext 4399

[vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov](mailto:vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov)



## Planning for the Future Assisted Living & Nursing Home Options

Having a conversation with our loved ones about long-term care needs can be difficult and often, we don't know how to start. It's best to have this discussion before the care is urgently needed, so the care receiver can be a part of the planning process and the various options of care are explored.

Fargo VA social workers offer an in-person class to provide education about types of senior housing, how to identify when more assistance is needed and to prepare for those changes. Discussion will also include information about resources for aging in place, State Veterans Homes, different levels of care, how to find the appropriate facility, and necessary documents to have on hand.

Dates for upcoming classes:

February 28, 2024

Time: 1:30 – 3:30pm CST

Room 1D-42 (Primary Care Check-in)

March 13, 2024

Time: 1:30 – 3:30pm CST

Room 1D-42 (Primary Care Check-in)

Virtual options are available on request. To register, please contact Vickie Ness, LBSW at 701-239-3700 ext 3561 or email [vickie.ness@va.gov](mailto:vickie.ness@va.gov)

## Welcome Kelsey!

Kelsey Aman, LMSW joined the Fargo VA Caregiver Support Program (CSP) in November 2023. She graduated with her Master of Social Work from the University of North Dakota and has 15 years of social work experience. Kelsey is based out of Bismarck and will bring CSP social work services to the western part of the state. She will be working within both of our CSP programs – Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAF) and Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS).

Kelsey is originally from South Dakota and transplanted to North Dakota after graduating high school. She loves to travel and has been to five different continents. Welcome Kelsey!

welcome



## Safe Transfers

The term 'transfer' denotes the action of moving an individual from one location to another. Body mechanics refers to the manner in which we move in our daily activities. Safety is critical for caregivers who assist Veterans with body mechanics and transfers. This resource is designed to equip caregivers with practical insights and best practices, fostering the safety and well-being of both the Veteran and you, the caregiver, as you assist with body mechanics and transfers.

### How to Transfer:

- Keep equipment, such as a walker or wheelchair, near the Veteran when transferring.
- During a wheelchair transfer, lock the brakes and remove the footrests.
- Use a transfer belt as needed.
- Place the Veteran's feet flat on the floor, if possible, and their hands on armrests, if available.
- Have the Veteran move to edge of seat.
- Help or tell the Veteran to lean forward before rising.
- Count to three before helping the Veteran stand up.
- Guide the Veteran to the next surface.

### Caregiver Body Mechanics:

- Stay close to the Veteran.
- Keep feet shoulder width apart.
- Keep the back straight.
- Lift with the legs.
- Move your feet, but do not twist your back.



### Keep in Mind:

- The Veteran should wear non-slip socks or shoes.
- Caregivers should use proper body mechanics to help prevent injury.
- Have the Veteran transfer towards their stronger side.
- Allow the Veteran to participate as much as safely possible.
- Ask a health care professional about any precautions or need for adapted equipment.

The VA Caregiver Support Program website ([www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)) has a Safe Transfers video series demonstrating safe ways to navigate bed mobility and wheelchair, toilet, & tub transfers. The series can be found at: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3AQ\\_JVoBEyxfGk3S1ICzVmIIBwrIY7Ta](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3AQ_JVoBEyxfGk3S1ICzVmIIBwrIY7Ta)

If more information is needed about available VA resources for safe transfers, please consult your Veteran's VA health care provider for referrals to physical therapy and occupational therapy.

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace the advice from a medical professional. You should consult your healthcare provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.

Source: [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)

## Upcoming Caregiver Support Line Education Calls:

### February – “Leaning into Love: Building Strong Relationship Bonds”

Tuesday, Feb. 6<sup>th</sup> at 9am CST  
 Wednesday, Feb. 14<sup>th</sup> at 6pm CST  
 Wednesday, Feb. 21<sup>st</sup> at 2pm CST

### March – “Beyond the Blues: Coping with Caregiver Depression”

Tuesday, Mar. 5<sup>th</sup> at 9am CST  
 Wednesday, Mar. 13<sup>th</sup> at 6pm CST  
 Wednesday, Mar. 20<sup>th</sup> at 2pm CST

### April – “Let's Talk about Money: Managing your Financial Reality”

Tuesday, Apr. 2<sup>nd</sup> at 9am CST  
 Wednesday, Apr. 10<sup>th</sup> at 6pm CST  
 Wednesday, Apr. 17<sup>th</sup> at 2pm CST

To begin accessing these calls please contact a member of the Caregiver Support Team who can assist with your initial registration!

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## Fargo VA Caregiver Support Team

Contact Us:  
 (701) 239-3700 ext. 4399  
[vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov](mailto:vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov)

## Memory Café Update:

Memory Cafés provide a welcoming environment where people with memory challenges and their loved ones can gather to share experiences, offer support, and socialize. The Memory Café has now expanded services to Valley City, ND and meets monthly.

Sheyenne Valley Memory Café  
Meeting location: Faith Lutheran Church  
309 4<sup>th</sup> St NE, Valley City, ND  
Fourth Thursday of each month  
1:00-3:00 pm

For more information, please contact (701) 845-8518. Memory Cafés are also located in Fargo, Bismarck, and Grand Forks and contact information can be found at [www.memorycafedirectory.com](http://www.memorycafedirectory.com).

## Farewell!

Loni Larson, LCSW will be retiring late March 2024. Loni has been a social worker at the Fargo VA since 2008. At first, she worked on the Community Living Center (CLC) and later transitioned to Whole Health. In 2020, she joined the Caregiver Support Program as a PCAFC social worker. She has been an integral part of the program, providing services with care and compassion. Though we wish her well in retirement, her kind and nurturing heart will be dearly missed. Happy Retirement, Loni!



## Breathing Exercise

Breathing deeply is a quick way to relax. You can do it almost any place and time you need to relieve stress. Deep breathing helps maintain a sense of calm and it is part of almost all relaxation and meditation techniques. The key is to breath deeply from your abdomen, rather than shallowly from your lungs, and get as much fresh air and oxygen into your lungs as possible.

### **Instructions:**

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.
- Put one hand on your stomach (and the other on your chest if possible).
- Feel your breathing for a short time, noticing the rise and fall of your stomach.
- Inhale deeply through your nose. As you breath in, the hand on your stomach should rise and the one on your chest should move very little.
- Exhale through your mouth – push out as much air as you can and feel your stomach tighten as it flattens. Again the hand on your stomach should move; your chest shouldn't move much.
- Be sure that you empty out all the air and then pause.
- Try to inhale to the count of 10 and then exhale to the count of 10 – this helps slow your breathing.
- Repeat this breathing for several minutes. If you are lying down, you can put a small book on your stomach and try to breathe so it rises as you inhale and falls when you exhale.



The above exercise is an excerpt from “Managing Stress”, one of self-care courses offered through the VA Caregiver Support Program. If you found this to be useful, consider participating in the next self-care course when offered. Beneficial coping skills and useful self-care tips are taught in these classes, give it a try!

*Source: US Dept of VA*

## Current Caregiver Support Program Offerings

### No Registration Required!

(though you may need to call to obtain the link)

#### Caregiver Support Groups:

Connect with other Caregivers to discuss challenges and share successes & experiences.

First Tuesday of the month, 5:30-7:30pm. Virtual.

Second Thursday of the month, 10:30am-12:00pm. In-person at the Fergus Falls Library.

Third Wednesday of the month, 1:00-2:30pm. Virtual.

#### Book Club:

First Thursday of the month, 3:00-4:00pm. Virtual.

#### Caregiver Support Program 101:

Third Tuesday of the month, 1:00-1:30pm. Virtual.

Informational session to learn what types of resources the CSP has to offer.

#### Caregiver Coffee Hour:

Second Monday of the month, 10:00-11:30am. In-person, Fargo VA 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Auditorium. Conversation, guest speakers, education, & coffee.

Still feeling a bit hesitant to join a caregiver support group or participate in an educational event? Caregivers have found much support and comradery from each other during these events. We often hear feedback such as, "I don't feel so alone anymore!" or "I'm glad I came!"



### Contact Us to Register:

(701)239-3700 ext. 4399

[vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov](mailto:vhafarcaregiversupport@va.gov)

#### REACH VA Parkinson's Group:

Four virtual sessions in April focusing on self-care, mood management, and problem solving. Registration closes on 3/26/24.

#### Caregivers FIRST:

Two in-person classes at the Bemidji VA clinic in May. Education on self-care, coping skills, communication, future planning, & problem solving, Registration closes on 5/7/24.

#### Dementia Education Group:

Tuesday, March 12, 1:00-3:00pm. Offered in-person at Fargo VA or virtually. For enrolled Veterans diagnosed with a neurocognitive disorder and their Caregivers.

#### ND Veterans Home Presentation:

Wednesday, February 28, 1:00-2:00pm. Virtual or phone. Informational session to learn about admission, eligibility, levels of care, and the application process.

#### Caregiver Health & Wellbeing Coaching:

Meet with a coach to develop a personalized plan focusing on your health & wellbeing. Explore connections, values, & goals.

#### Annie Caregiver Text:

A text messaging service that sends tips, resources, and strategies to support Caregivers. Messages can be tailored for specific topics or diagnoses.

#### Tai Chi Chih:\*

Mondays, 9:30-10:30am. Virtual or in-person (Fargo VA, Whole Health Center 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor).

#### Tai Chi for Arthritis & Fall Prevention:\*

Second Thursday of the month, 9:30-10:15am. Virtual.

Fourth Thursday of the month, 1:00-1:45pm. Virtual.

\*Call ext 3990 to register.