



Developing a More Dementia-Capable Home Care Workforce: Improving Dementia Care Training for Home Care Teams

A Look at How ComForCare's DementiaWise® Program
Transforms Dementia Care Training for Home Care Teams

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Executive Summary

The home care industry is experiencing a significant stress test: agencies are challenged to recruit, train, and retain home care workers in the midst of a workforce shortage, while meeting the needs of a growing population of people aging at home with dementia.

The need for dementia-capable home care services is staggering. As of 2022, 6.5 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease, the most common type of dementia, and the number is expected to double (12.7 million) by 2050 (Alzheimer's Association, 2022). The majority of people with any type of dementia (80%) are community-dwelling and receiving care in their homes (CDC, 2019). Older adults with dementia rely on larger care networks than their counterparts, which more often includes paid caregivers for assistance with self-care, mobility, household activities, transportation, health care system interaction, and health/medical care. In 2015, older adults with dementia received approximately three times as many hours of paid assistance per month compared to those without dementia (146 hours vs. 47 hours, respectively) (Chi et al., 2019). The demand for home care is expected to remain high because, despite the progressive disease, people living with dementia at home experience greater quality of life than those living in care facilities (Nikmat et al., 2015). Meanwhile, a lack of effective dementia care training designed specifically for these home care workers is putting enormous strain on home care agencies, their employees, and the families they support (Reckrey et al., 2021).

A few constants remain, which can help drive solutions for this challenging time:

- 1) People living with dementia prefer to age at home over residential facilities;
- 2) Access to knowledgeable in-home help to grant family caregivers respite or address the most difficult dementia care tasks can improve care outcomes and cut costs;
- 3) Effective dementia care training for home care workers plays a key role in improving life for these clients and families, while reducing burnout for the workers themselves.

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To understand what home care workers want and need in their dementia care training—and to assess how well the DementiaWise® program addressed their needs, ComForCare commissioned an independent program evaluation study and distilled the key findings in this report. Essential reading for all stakeholders in the home care industry, this report reveals innovative program design features and critical success factors—from dementia-specific knowledge to lessons applied in the home environment and team-centered problem solving—to help home care teams resolve the most pressing dementia-related challenges in their work with greater self-efficacy and satisfaction.

Dementia Workforce Development Challenges in a Changing Home Care Environment

Of the over 6 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia, most remain in their homes throughout the progression of the disease—an option that can afford greater comfort, familiarity, and quality of life compared to institutional care. Benefits of home notwithstanding, research reveals that individuals and families dealing with dementia at home face significant disease-related and social challenges (Leigh et al., 2019). Thus, there is an urgent and growing need for more dementia-capable home care services. In light of the situation, stakeholders—including policy makers, administrators, families, and people living with dementia—continuously emphasize interdisciplinary staff training to create a more dementia-capable home care workforce (Weiss et al., 2020).

Ensuring a dementia-capable workforce for the home care industry garners national attention, as people with dementia and their families utilize home care services at higher rates than the general population (Alzheimer's Association, 2022).

To design and implement effective training, program developers must address the blended nature of the home care workforce. In 2019, there were approximately 2.3 million home care workers in the United States, including home health employees and non-medical home care employees (Tyler et al., 2021).

- **Home health agencies** provide clinical services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, nursing, and supplemental personal care assistance funded by Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance.
- **Non-medical home care** refers primarily to non-clinical services, such as personal care, supervision and companion care, meal preparation, and transportation. Non-medical home care is typically funded by private pay, limited Medicaid coverage, or long-term health insurance policies, not Medicare.

Given the diverse educational backgrounds of these caregivers as well as other challenges of the disease, developing a dementia-capable workforce has proven a challenge for the entire health care industry, including home care agencies. Despite an abundance of proven dementia care strategies and significant time spent in traditional lecture-style training designed to disseminate information, caregivers of all disciplines still struggle to apply knowledge after the training in real-life situations (McKay et al., 2021a). Experts warn that well-meaning team members can burn out under the stress of dementia caregiving without effective on-the-job training and support (Bolt et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2009). A more dynamic and effective solution is necessary to help the myriad of caregivers resolve real-world challenges as they occur in their clients' homes. However, training designed to help home care teams resolve their most challenging cases with teamwork—effectively applying their knowledge in practice together—have been nonexistent until now.

Home Care for Clients with Dementia Involves Specific Knowledge and Skills

Designing effective training for home care workers requires an understanding of what home care workers must know to effectively support clients living at home with dementia. Home care workers supporting clients with dementia face special challenges, including but not limited to: assisting the person with dementia in their performance of daily activities (e.g., eating, making meals, bathing, paying bills, participating in community activities), optimizing the home environment for safety and function, and educating and supporting family caregivers. This care is complicated by the presence of behavioral symptoms (neuropsychiatric symptoms) including but not limited to: wandering, depression, suspicion, insomnia, sexual behavior in public, personality clashes (e.g., arguing, accusations, physical aggression), and resistance to help with personal care (Cloak & Khalili, 2022). These behavioral symptoms tend to pose the most challenges to caregivers (to say nothing of the difficulties for people living with symptoms and their families)—more than the physical dependence or functional impairments typical of other types of caregiving (Brodaty & Arasaratnam, 2012). The good news for home care workers is that research exists regarding types, symptoms, and progression of dementia, as well as effective dementia care strategies (Gitlin, et al, 2015; Kales et al., 2022; McKay et al., 2022b).

Translating Dementia-Specific Knowledge and Skills to Real-World Solutions Requires Teamwork

In addition to designing training according to *what* home care workers need to know, there must be additional considerations *for whom* the training is designed. In the broadest sense, home care teams represent a blended group of professionals and paraprofessionals including traditional healthcare workers, support staff, and administrators—all of whom are involved directly or indirectly in the care of clients with dementia and their families at home. The team is referred to as “blended,” because it includes employees such as franchise owners, administrative assistants, and support staff; yet they were once excluded from dementia care training on the basis of their “non-clinical” or “para-professional” status, despite the fact that these employees frequently encounter people with dementia and their families during everyday work situations. This blended nature is critical, as reflected by the 2017 National Research Summit on Dementia Care when they listed one of their primary recommendations as: examining and including interdisciplinary teams in all stages of program development, and designing training for varied professional and non-professional groups to account for the real-world nature of dementia care services (Gitlin & Maslow, 2018; McKay et al, 2022a).

COVID-19 Intensified Home Care Workforce Challenges

Some of the challenges home care teams have encountered since 2020 were entirely new and resulted directly from the Covid-19 pandemic. In other cases, the pandemic worsened long-standing challenges in the industry and shed new light on the need for new, more effective on-the-job training (Tyler et al., 2021). For instance, staffing shortages were exacerbated by recruitment and retention problems and limited training for home care workers. Early reporting suggested home care utilization dipped at the beginning of the pandemic, placing additional economic strain on home care agencies

(presumably due to consumers' fear of exposure to the virus) (Rowe et al., 2020). Staff were leaving their home care jobs, recruiting new staff was difficult, and agencies had to scramble to adapt training protocols (Span, 2020). In more recent reports, demand for home care has rebounded, as it is viewed as an important means of delaying institutional care and reducing hospitalization (Flynn et al., 2020). While agencies celebrate the rise in demand, adding more staff has proven more challenging, which leaves the current team vulnerable to burnout.

New Training Programs Are Needed to Improve Care and Avoid Burnout

Today, a plethora of dementia care educational programs incorporate information about the disease and research-informed interventions (Surr et al., 2017). However, despite robust evidence for effective care strategies and ample educational programs designed to disseminate knowledge to caregivers and improve care, *knowledge alone* is inadequate to improve a team's performance (Gitlin & Maslow, 2018). ComForCare and At Your Side Home Care, together with Partnerships for Health (a dementia care consulting company), have therefore turned their attention to the essential design flaw that experts believe has limited traditional dementia care training. Teams lack opportunities to plan, test, evaluate, and reflect *as a team* on the process of adapting responses to real-world challenges (McKay et al., 2021b). With that knowledge translation problem in mind, it is logical to conclude that merely spending more hours in traditional training would not adequately improve life for these clients, their families, and home care teams. Instead, entirely new program designs are needed, which target the team's dynamic process of *collaboratively applying knowledge in practice and resolving real-world challenges together*.

Experts believe an essential design flaw in traditional training contributes to the knowledge-to-practice gap—teams lack opportunities to plan, test, evaluate, and reflect as a team on the process of adapting responses to real-world challenges.

DementiaWise® as an Innovative Solution

In 2019, [ComForCare](#) and [At Your Side Home Care](#) sought consultation from Partnerships for Health to embark on a program-development process to completely redesign dementia care training for their home care teams. The following year, a program called DementiaWise® launched in their franchises across the U.S. and Canada. DementiaWise® is an innovative training video series that is both occupation-based and team-centered to help blended home care teams resolve dementia-related challenges collaboratively with their clients. The program is changing the way home care agencies approach dementia training across the U.S. and Canada.

In the DementiaWise® video, the home care team demonstrates how they translate their collective knowledge into collaborative real-world solutions, which distinguishes DementiaWise® from traditional, lecture-style programs.

Key Features of the Innovative Program Design

In DementiaWise®, person-centered care is the team's standard and goal, and twelve DementiaWise® strategies are the team's tools of the trade. The new program doesn't just deliver a lecture of information and strategies to learners. Instead, in DementiaWise®, learning is viewed as a dynamic process of knowledge translation—a process that involves collaborative problem-solving, reasoning, and reflection on experiences. To accomplish this, in addition to explaining disease-specific content and practical caregiving skills, the video training depicts a frontline caregiver working with their team. They encounter common dementia-related challenges in home care and apply their knowledge in practice. It's this team's demonstration of translating collective knowledge into collaborative real-world solutions that distinguishes DementiaWise® from traditional lecture-style programs. As learners hear about a clinical case from the perspective of home care workers, they can better understand how the challenge arose in the case—a step designed to help learners recognize and find the root causes for dementia-related challenges in their own work. Learners watch as the team investigates a potential root cause of the problem, then creates an intervention plan using the DementiaWise® strategies tailored to the case. In the video, the team's shared challenges help to structure content while merging knowledge of the disease, evidence-based care strategies, client, situation, and care environment into best-practice solutions. Real stories from home care employees in the video exemplify solutions fueled by knowledge of dementia care, creativity, and teamwork.

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In this new program, the team's success is measured by an expanded ability to tap into learning in novel situations. The program emphasizes a generalizable process of problem solving, not just dementia-specific content. For example, after the team resolves the first challenge in their case with the appropriate strategies, a twist happens as the client's dementia progresses. As the case evolves, the team repeats the same process of collaborative problem-solving. This leads them to apply more knowledge and hands-on skills which are perfectly suited for the latest challenge in the case. Throughout the program, ComForCare employees are thus featured as role models—communicating to mobilize their collective knowledge and expertise. They also lend practical tips from frontline caregivers, franchise owners and managers, as well as award-winning occupational therapist and dementia care expert, Dr. Heather McKay.

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DementiaWise® Evaluation From the Point of View of Home Care Teams

Program evaluation can serve many purposes, including program improvement, accountability and decision-making, judgements of merit, worth, and impact, and ultimately promoting societal well-being (Gargani & Miller, 2016). Such an evaluation was done on the DementiaWise® training from the perspective of home care teams, the design, and outcome of which follows.

Program Evaluation Objectives

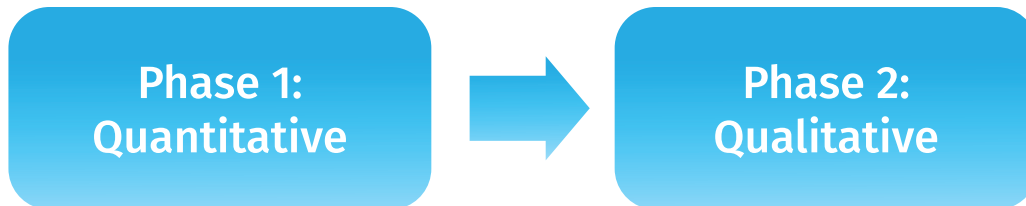
In this case, the creators of DementiaWise® were interested to know what home care teams needed in their dementia care training to help them apply their knowledge in practice and avoid burnout; and if and how DementiaWise® met their needs. While burnout is complex and multi-dimensional, it can be linked to two insufficiencies:

- Self-efficacy
- Satisfaction

Thus, ComForCare commissioned an independent program evaluation study to better understand the specific impacts on self-efficacy and satisfaction, if any, that DementiaWise® training had on home care team members, and what aspects of the program were most salient in their view.

Program Evaluation Methods

The research team, students, and faculty at Duke Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program, in collaboration with Dr. Heather McKay of Partnerships for Health, conducted a mixed-methods case-control study using both quantitative and qualitative methods as follows.



	Phase 1: Quantitative	Phase 2: Qualitative
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop initial hypotheses• Test hypotheses• Quantify results	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gain insights into program success factors from the point of view of home care team members who have completed the training
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online case-control survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual in-depth phone interviews
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home care team members of all job titles• Sample of those who watched the DementiaWise® training video and those who had not	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A small subset of the case sample, home care team members who have watched the DementiaWise® training video

For evaluation purposes, home care team members were defined as follows:

- Employees of ComForCare or At Your Side Home Care
- Any job title, including frontline caregivers such as in-home aides and other paraprofessionals, health care professionals (e.g., nurses, therapists, social workers), clinical managers, franchise owners, and administrative staff

The evaluation sample included representatives of two key subgroups:

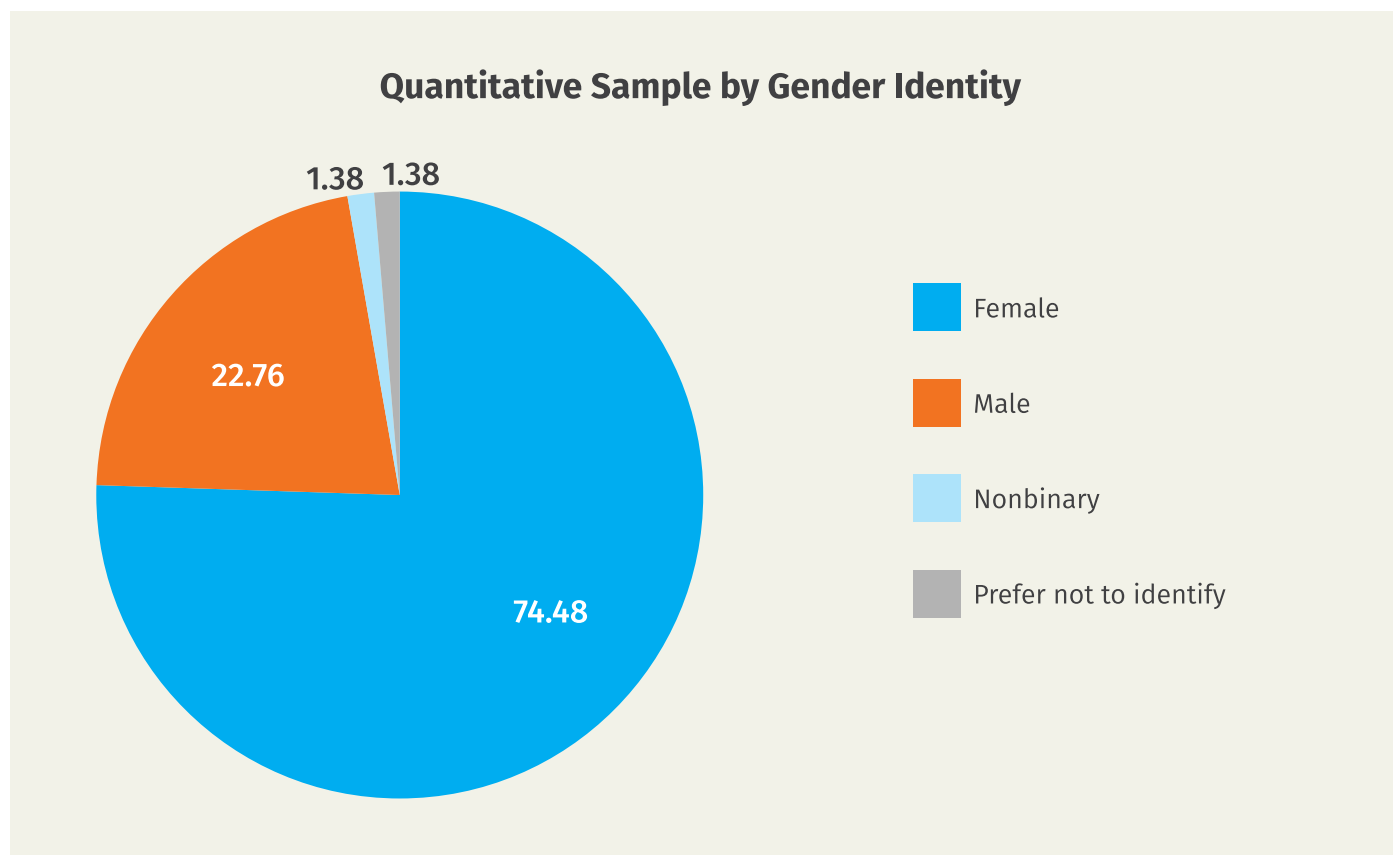
- Case group: home care team members who had watched DementiaWise® training videos
- Control group: home care team members who had not yet watched DementiaWise® training videos

The evaluation hypothesis: Home care team workers who engaged in DementiaWise® training will demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy and satisfaction than those who did not receive DementiaWise® training.

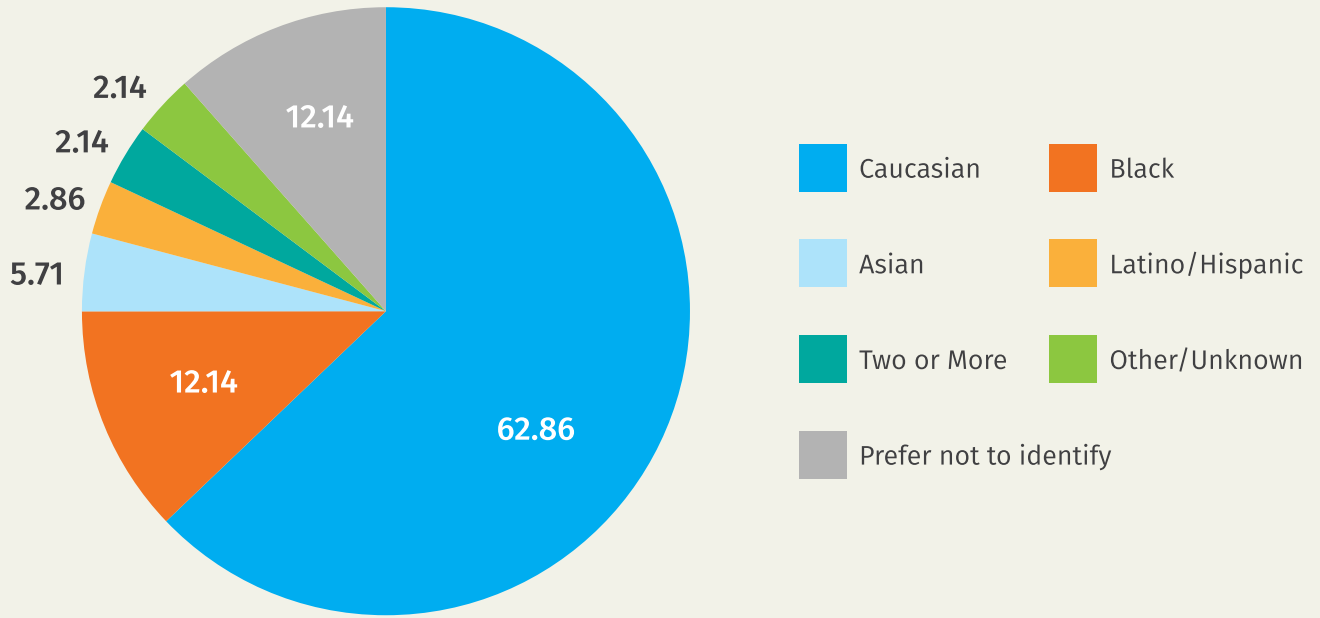
The program evaluation study was developed and conducted between fall 2021 and spring 2022. We note that the scope of this study did not include participants outside the previously defined inclusion criteria, so comparative data for others outside of that sample population is not currently available.

Quantitative Sample

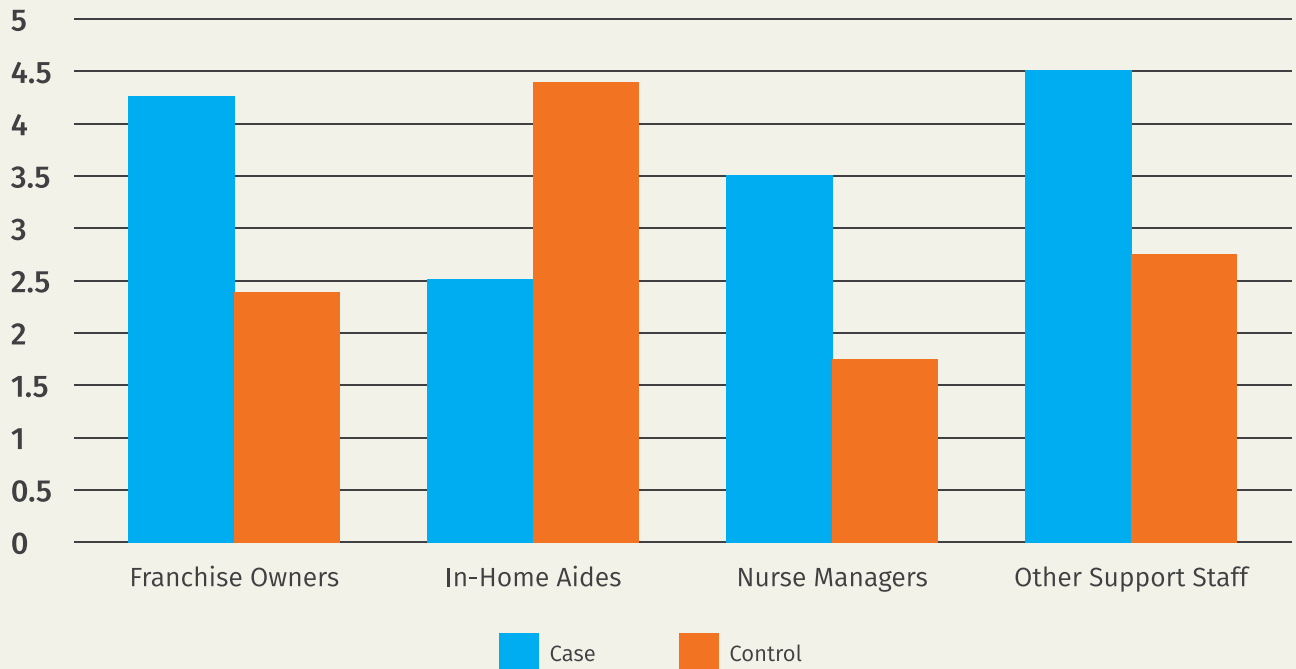
In February 2022, a total of 203 surveys were submitted by home care team members representing different gender and racial identities, a mix of job titles, and a range of geographical locations as indicated below.



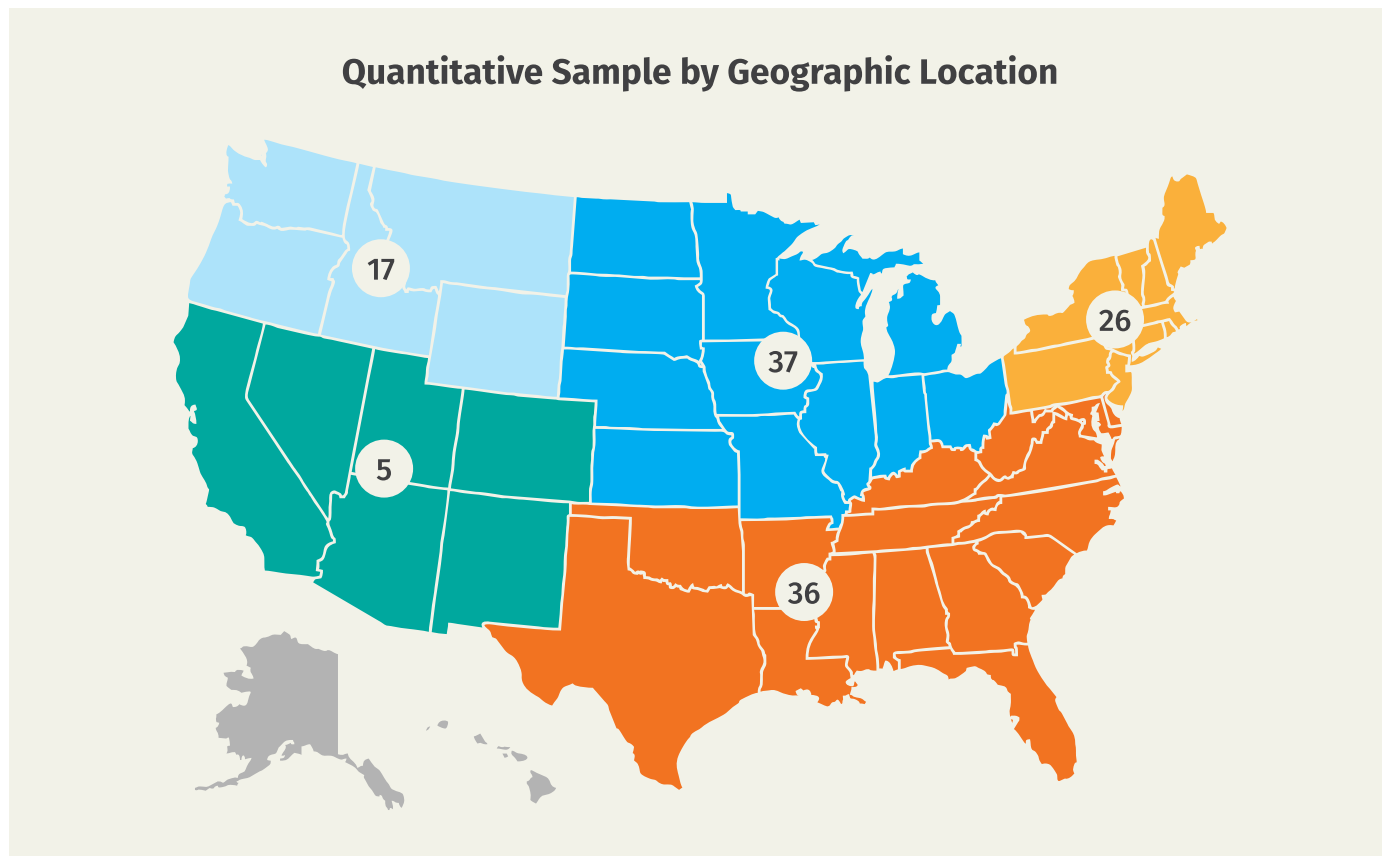
Quantitative Sample by Racial Identity



Quantitative Sample by Job Title



Quantitative Sample by Geographic Location



Since some surveys were excluded on the basis of being incomplete, the final sample included:

- 139 submissions for self-efficacy
- 143 submissions for satisfaction

Qualitative Sample

In April 2022, a subset of five from the case group who had completed the DementiaWise® training engaged in one-on-one, in-depth phone interviews. The interview protocol, developed by the research team, aimed to investigate:

- The nature of home care with clients living with dementia.
- The most salient features of the DementiaWise® training from participants' perspectives.

Beyond exposure to the program and availability for the interview, the qualitative sample selected included representation by gender and job title. Specifically, the sample represented: four females and one male—including four franchise owners and one in-home aide.

Summary of the Case-Control Survey Results

A program evaluation study conducted by student and faculty researchers at Duke University Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program and Partnerships for Health found home care workers who completed the DementiaWise® training felt better equipped and empowered to collaboratively care for clients living with dementia and their families (self-efficacy) and experienced greater job satisfaction compared to teammates who had not yet completed DementiaWise®.

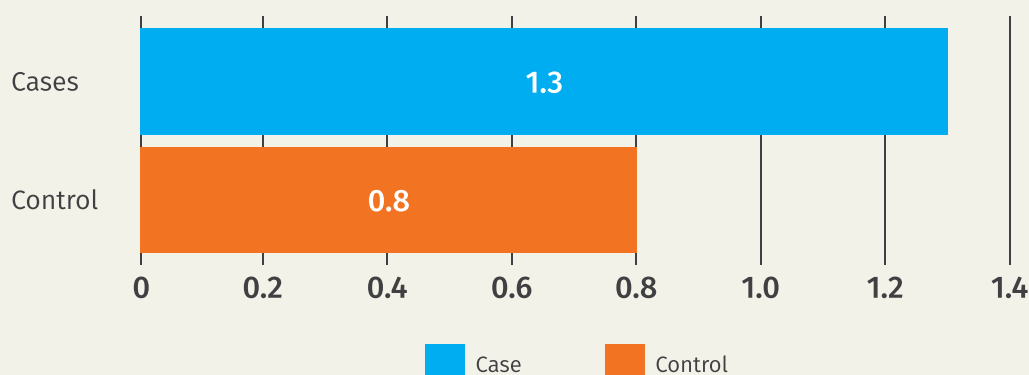
To test their hypothesis, researchers conducted an inferential statistical analysis of survey responses. Following are more details on the findings.

Self-Efficacy and DementiaWise® Training

The researchers conducted a statistical analysis called odds ratio (OR) to measure the association between exposure to the new training and outcomes for the home care team members. The OR calculations for team members' self efficacy were as follows:

- Cases: # of home care team (HCT) members who watched/rewatched DementiaWise® and experienced higher self-efficacy (55) by # of HCT members who had not watched DementiaWise® and experienced higher self-efficacy (44) = $55/44 = 1.3$
- Controls: # of HCT members who watched/rewatched DementiaWise® and experienced lower self-efficacy (19) divided by # of HCT members who had not watched DementiaWise® and experienced lower self-efficacy (24) = $19/24 = 0.8$
- OR = $1.3 / 0.8 = 1.6$

Odds of Exposure in Cases vs. Controls for Self-Efficacy



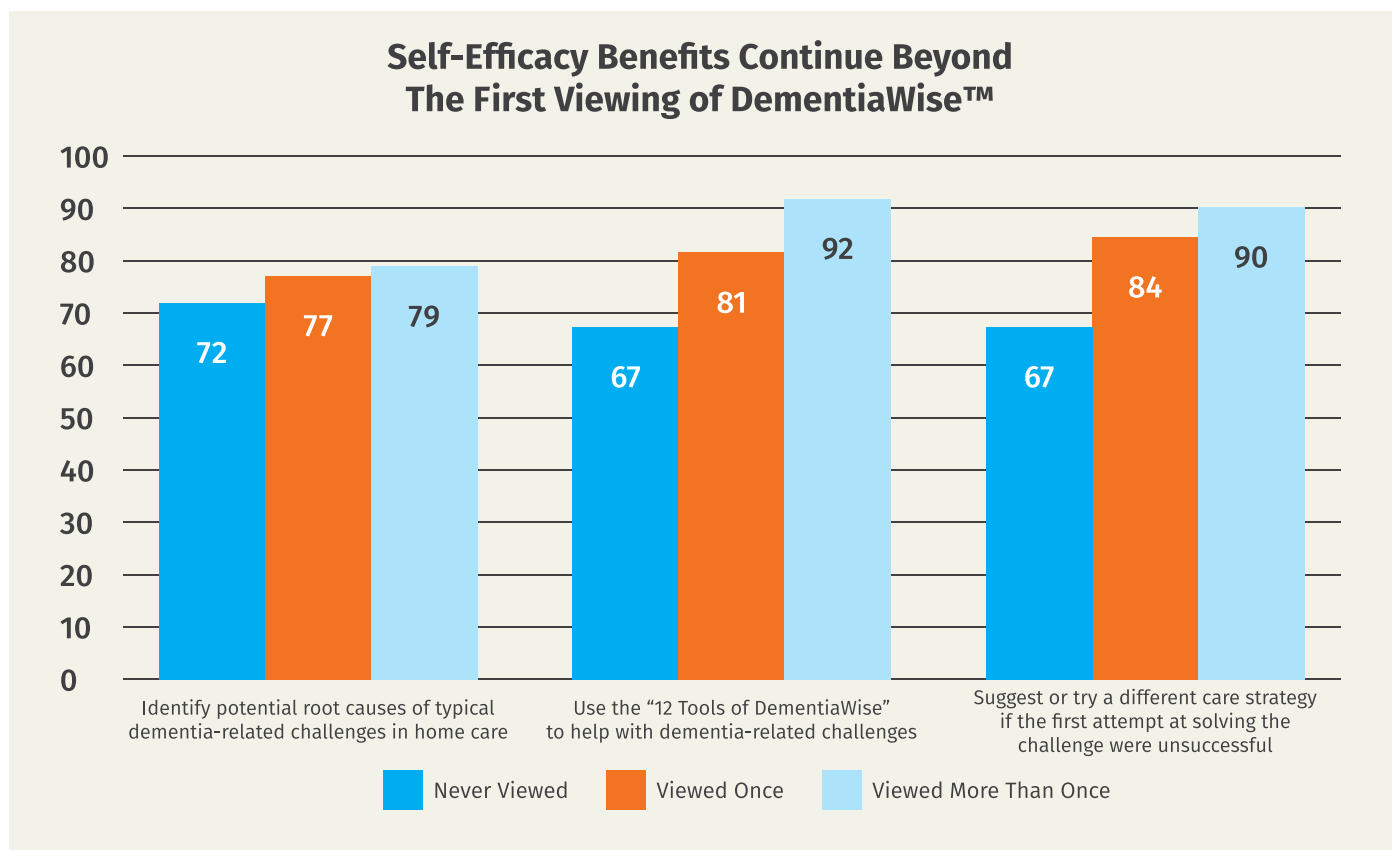
Interpretation

As stated, DementiaWise® training was positively associated with higher self-efficacy among home care team members at ComForCare, as the odds of higher self-efficacy in those who watched/rewatched DementiaWise® was 1.6 times the odds of higher self-efficacy in those who have not yet watched DementiaWise®.

To measure self-efficacy, participants were asked to think about specific self-efficacy statements and rate how strongly they agree with each statement, using a 0 to 100 scale. A closer look at specific aspects of self-efficacy revealed that home care team members continued to benefit from the DementiaWise® videos beyond the first viewing. A sample of the self-efficacy statements and the mean scores for the three groups (never viewed, viewed once, and viewed more than once) are reported in the chart below. Specifically, the more exposure team members had to the videos, the more capable they felt to:

- 1) Identify potential root causes of typical dementia-related challenges they might encounter in home care;
- 2) Use the “12 Tools of DementiaWise” to help with a dementia-related challenge;
- 3) Suggest or try a different care strategy if the first attempt at resolving the challenge were unsuccessful.

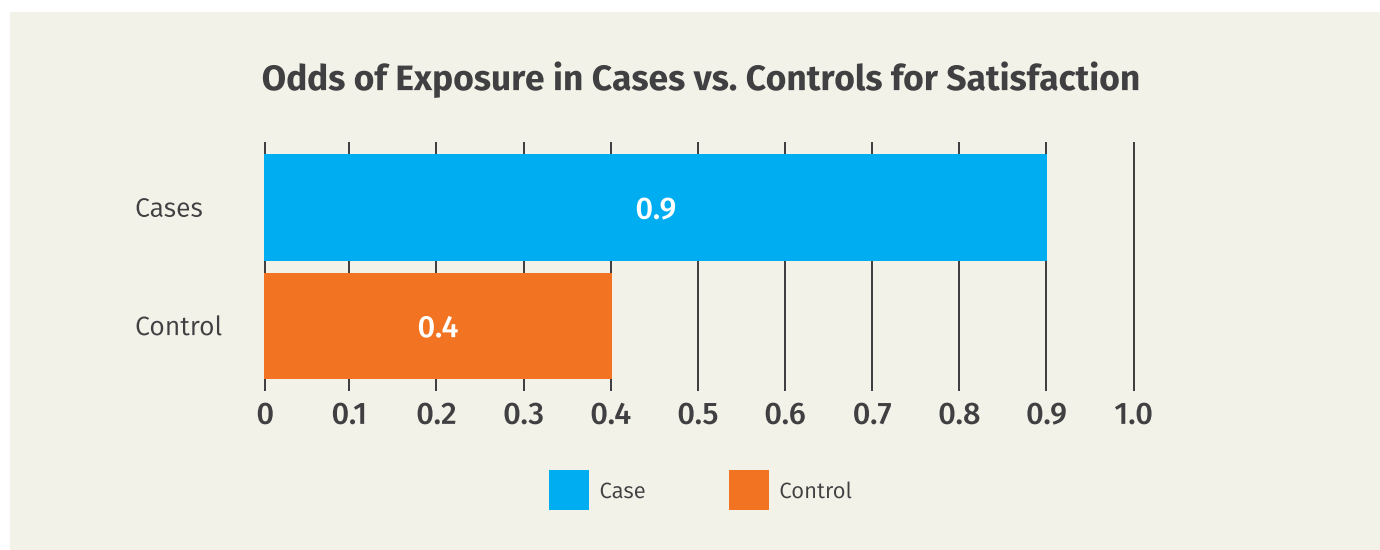
Home care team members reported continued self-efficacy gains when they viewed the training videos more than once. Those who refreshed their training annually or semi-annually felt the most capable to apply dementia care strategies and collaborative problem solving, which suggests DementiaWise® has long-range benefits for these teams.



Satisfaction and DementiaWise® Training

For home care team members' satisfaction, the odds ratio (OR) calculations were as follows:

- Cases: # of HCT members who watched/rewatched DementiaWise® and experienced higher satisfaction (62) divided by # of HCT members who have not watched DementiaWise® and experienced higher satisfaction (66) = $62/66 = 0.9$
- Controls: # of HCT members who watched/rewatched DementiaWise® and experienced lower satisfaction (4) divided by # of HCT members who have not watched DementiaWise® and experienced lower satisfaction (11) = $4/11 = 0.4$
- OR = $0.9 / 0.4 = 2.2$

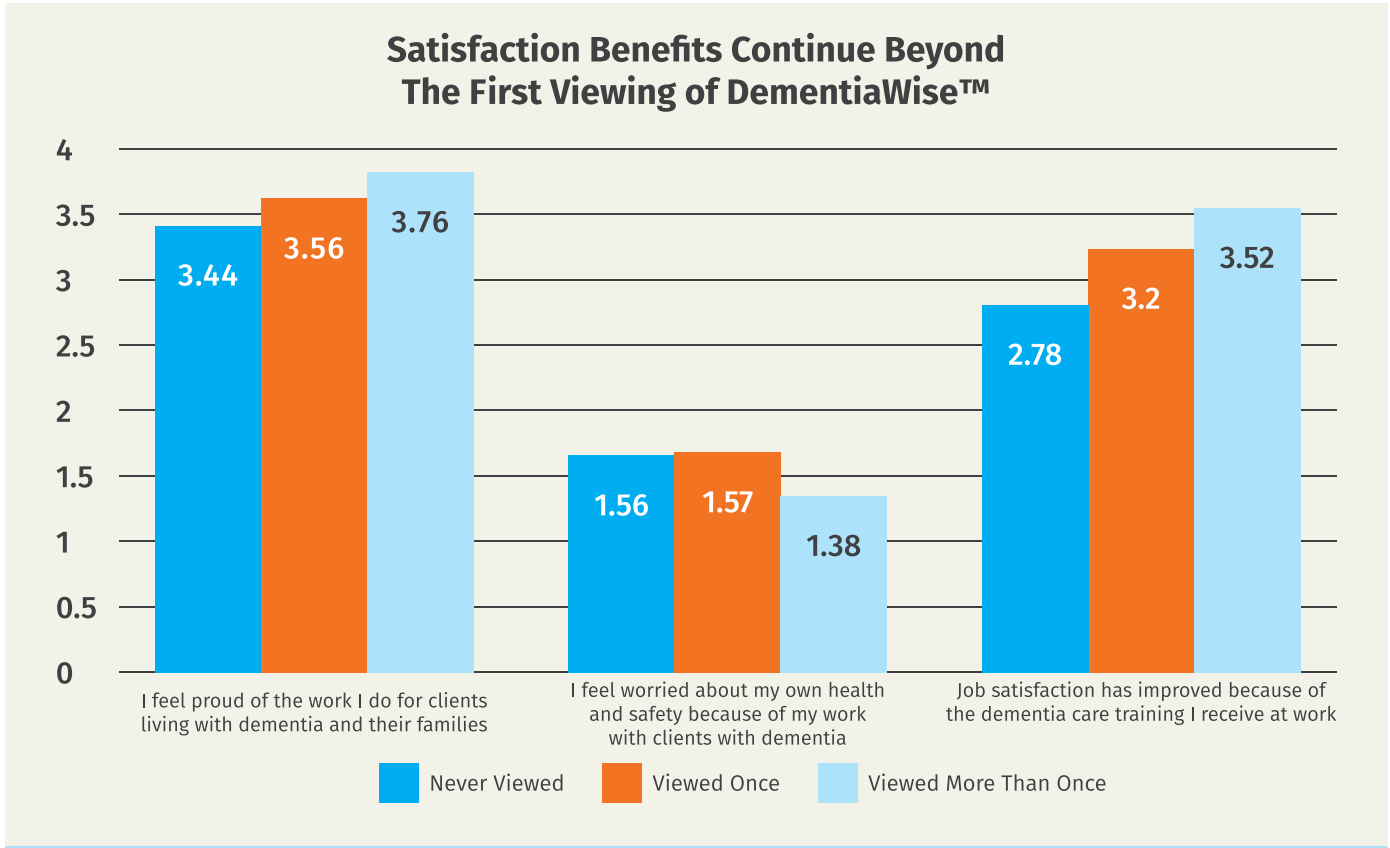


Interpretation

DementiaWise® training was positively associated with higher satisfaction among home care team members at ComForCare, as the odds of higher satisfaction in those who watched DementiaWise® were 2.2 times the odds of higher satisfaction in those who had not yet watched DementiaWise®.

When home care team members rated their agreement with specific satisfaction statements using a Likart scale (0=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree), the the mean satisfaction scores across the three groups (never viewed, viewed once, and viewed more than once) were the highest for team members who viewed the training more than once. A sample of the satisfaction statements are reported in the chart below with mean scores for the three exposure groups. Those who refreshed their training at least annually felt: 1) More pride in their work with clients living with dementia and their families; 2) Less worry about their own health and safety regarding dementia care; 3) Greater overall job satisfaction because of their dementia care training at work compared to those who had not completed the training. Again, satisfaction results suggest that the training had continued benefits when reviewed more than once. This is an important consideration for home care managers who wish to get maximum return on their training investment and for team members who prefer training that *keeps on giving* over traditional lectures that quickly seem stale.

Home care team members who viewed the training more than once reported the greatest satisfaction gains. Those who refreshed their training annually or semi-annually felt more pride in their work with clients living with dementia and their families, less worry about their own health and safety regarding dementia care, and greater overall job satisfaction because of their dementia care training at work.



Overall, the results of the case-control survey were positive and the odds ratios were statistically significant for DementiaWise®, supporting the researchers' hypothesis that the training would improve team members' self-efficacy to resolve dementia-related challenges in the care environment and increase satisfaction in their work.

Key Themes from In-Depth Interviews

Home care team members attributed the positive impact the training had on their self-efficacy and satisfaction to specific features of the program including emphasis on communication, helping clients live life to the fullest, seeing clients in their totality, and developing soft skills for caregiving on a team, among other features.

Multiple themes emerged from the qualitative interviews relative to what home care team members considered important takeaways of the DementiaWise® training.

Supporting Communication

Participants gleaned from the DementiaWise® training *that communication in the whole team dynamic determines success*. In the training, communication was emphasized among teammates, between direct caregivers and their clients, and between the team and other family caregivers connected to the case. Following are sample quotes reflecting what team members took from the training regarding communication:

- “The very nature of the business is that we have to communicate all the time.”
- “It’s not just about listening to the words coming out of [the client’s] mouth. It’s listening to everything: their body language, how they’re presenting.”

Facilitating Living the Best Life Possible

Participants gleaned from the training that, with support, clients can still live out their lives to the fullest, despite dementia. Illustrative of this theme, one participant said, “The program shows us we gotta stop treating people like they’re dying from this disease. We’ve got to start looking at it like they’re living with it, and we just have to help them live their best life possible.”

Real stories from home care employees in the video exemplify solutions fueled by knowledge of dementia care, creativity, and teamwork.

Building Soft Skills

Another key takeaway from the training was that caregiving involves *what you do* and *how you do it*, meaning that the best caregivers have soft skills. Following are sample quotes of what was most salient to team members about soft skills:

- “DementiaWise® teaches you how to be patient...and I think that was the biggest takeaway for me personally, because it taught me how to be a little more patient and listen a little better.”
- “It taught me how to take the focus off of myself and focus on other people.”
- “So, I was able, because of DementiaWise®, to pull myself away from my selfishness and [respond differently in the situation]...”
- “I was more likely to accept people who are a little bossier, you know, because I thought, ‘Oh, well, they’ll be able to get things done.’ But now, you know, I realize that the soft way is usually the better way. You know, sometimes showing warmth and just caring works better than the more directive approach.”
- “Without DementiaWise®, it’s like telling a construction guy to go build a house without a hammer.”
- “You have no idea what you just did for me, because you changed my whole outlook on how I treat clients living with dementia and their families...”

Seeing Clients in Their Totality and Staying Ready for Change

Participants gleaned from the training the importance of holistically meeting clients where they are in their lives while adapting to changes over time. One participant said, “The training helps us think about who [our clients] are, what their situation is, how we can work with them, and also to be flexible as those needs change. Because when you have a client for some time with dementia, you will definitely see changes.”

Making a Positive Difference

Another common theme among team members’ perspectives is that by helping them resolve real-world challenges for their clients with dementia and their families, the home care workers felt they were making a positive difference for their clients and each other. The following comments suggest that the training helped them feel like they could make a positive difference:

- “When you make a difference in someone’s life, you’re doing God’s work, and this program makes doing that easier.”
- “I oversee operations and try to make sure that we’re providing high-quality care to all of our clients...this program gives me important guideposts.”
- “[An independent agency tracking quality of care] calls a certain number of our clients every month to find out, you know, if they’re satisfied with the services that we’re providing...the program seems to have made a difference...We won Best of Homecare Award and Leader in Excellence Award...”

Developing a More Dementia-Capable Home Care Workforce—Recommendations

Given the growing rates of people living with dementia and the significant strain still on the home care industry post-pandemic, improving the quality of dementia care training for home care workers is important to all stakeholders' long-term sustainability. Without training which targets knowledge translation and helps teams resolve real dementia-related challenges in the care environment, the current gap between knowledge and practice is likely to persist, and the risk for burnout among home care teams will likely remain high. The authors therefore believe that home care agencies should consider utilizing the DementiaWise® program when developing training for their teams, and/or implementing actions gleaned from the program to help them create a more dementia-capable workforce.

Based on the evaluation findings in this study that the program was a valuable tool for home care teams, the following recommendations are focused on:

- Accelerating the implementation of DementiaWise®
- Developing additional training that helps home care workers apply knowledge in practice collaboratively to resolve their pressing, dementia-related challenges

Target the Whole Team

In the first wave of DementiaWise® implementation, the video program was first viewed by home care franchise owners and managers, which accounted for the large number of those administrators among survey respondents. However, since the program is intended for all members of the home care team, as it gained exposure company-wide, other members of the team—including frontline caregivers, clinical professionals, and support staff—were adamant about the training's value.

Historically, many trainings have been tailored for one group or another with the assumption that certain teammates needed x information and skills, while another group should learn y about dementia. Separating groups for training by titles—not to mention excluding some altogether based on their non-clinical status, despite their regular interaction with these clients or their families—likely contributes to the “silo” effect that healthcare workers often describe (“that group does their thing in isolation while we do ours, and problems that require teamwork go unsolved”). Instead, this study prompts a recommendation to design training that is team-centered—including all members of the home care team in all phases of program development, implementation, and evaluation. DementiaWise® has a “for-us-by-us” nature, as more team members are seen as *content and process experts modeling best-practice dementia care* throughout the training.

Depict the Contexts of Home Care

Participants in this study pointed to important differences between caring for clients with dementia in home care versus other settings. In order for teams to recognize, analyze, and resolve challenges when they arise in their client's homes, the study showed how the team's training must reflect those realistic situations. In addition to representing frontline workers in their clients' homes, dementia home care training should also reflect the other places where team-centered communication realistically happens for teams. For example, as the camera follows the caregiver in DementiaWise®, learners see her collaborating on the treatment plan with her partners in the office, implementing the plan in the client's home, reaching out to the clinical manager on the phone, and circling back to the team at the office between home visits. Through its variety of people, places, and work routines, the film offers a more realistic representation of home care teams collaboratively supporting people with dementia.

Use Challenging Cases to Situate Real-World Problem-Solving

Based on this research, the authors recommend training for home care teams include methodological choices which actively feed problem-solving. DementiaWise® swapped a content-focused design for case-based learning (CBL)—also referred to as problem-based learning (PBL)—to promote higher-level critical thinking and clinical problem-solving (Yoo & Park, 2014). According to Kantar and Massouh (2015), case-based learners first recognize a situation as a problem and define its details in contextual terms. In the video, the home care team starts with a realistic case of a client living with dementia, encounters a challenge/problem, and then assimilates knowledge from previous experiences and dementia care research to generate better hypotheses about the problem's root cause and possible solutions. Finally, the team collaboratively decides on appropriate actions for implementation in the case (tailoring evidence-based strategies to fit their client). The problem-solving modeled in the program (the DICE approach by Kales and colleagues (2022)) is intentionally interdisciplinary and engages employees with different roles to maximize the social aspects of learning and promote collaboration across the blended team. Another benefit of this sort of case-based learning and team-involvement allows for the situation to take twists and turns. For example, the team in DementiaWise® models learning through reflective action, which evolves through place and time as situations in the case evolve, as Coppola (2013) described. The videos model active learning beyond isolated training sessions, as home care team members engage in ongoing action between team meetings. During these action periods (the time between the team's meetings), the caregiver tries DementiaWise® strategies with the client at home, then returns to the team meeting to share impressions and implications of what happened. All of this action and ongoing problem-solving is possible when the real-world case is used as the driving force.

Pin Knowledge and Skills to the Case for Just-in-Time Application

As any educator will attest, the decision about what topics to cover in a training, and what content to leave for another time, is difficult. Dementia care training is no different, as evidenced by the abundance of over-packed lecture series on soup-to-nuts topics covering the types of dementia, symptoms, disease progression, and a vast range of treatment approaches—from behavioral interventions to environmental modifications and activity adjustments. When information is presented by topic, the training could seemingly go on forever, while learners could still struggle to apply this knowledge to everyday situations with clients. The preferred approach is to select only content that is relevant to the case, and then show the home care team applying the lessons right away in their work. As the case takes a turn, or more cases are introduced, additional knowledge and skills become relevant to the case just in time for application. In this way, a wide variety of cases are used for advancing more knowledge and skills (the topics and skills are added as the cases change), at the same time the team's collaborative problem-solving is reinforced with repetition (they use the same process for analyzing cases).

The preferred approach is to select only content that is relevant to the case, and then show the home care team applying the lessons right away in their work.

Highlight Team Communication, Collaboration, and Cooperation

Throughout the DementiaWise® video, the entire home care team:

- Taps their collective knowledge and experience
- Plans interventions, which are a culmination of the group's creative ideas
- Implements those plans in the care environment with teamwork

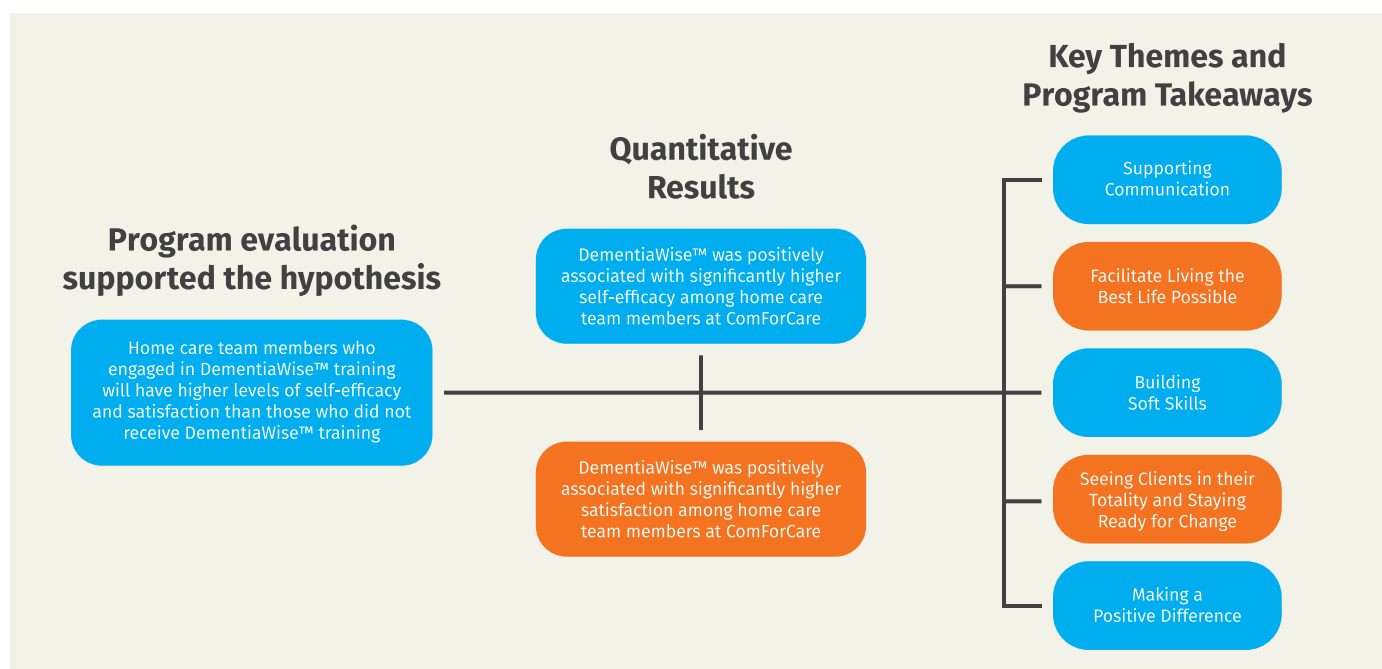
Their teamwork is constantly fueled by communication, collaboration, and cooperation. In addition to dementia-related facts and skills, training should thus also emphasize the collaborative process through which teams paint a fuller picture of their case from multiple perspectives, brainstorm potential root causes of their challenge, generate more intervention ideas from their collective repertoire, and combine their efforts to carry out plans with greater effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction for everyone involved. When training targets teamwork, in addition to dementia-specific topics, the team's progress is also measured by their collective process improvements, in addition to what they individually know about the brain condition. As the team flows more smoothly through steps of collaborative problem-solving, they are not only better equipped to solve their current challenges, but they are better prepared for future challenges that home care with this population will inevitably serve their way.

In Conclusion: Along the Journey, Program Development is Ongoing

As the number of people living with dementia in the community climbs, the demand for dementia-capable home care is expected to rise in tandem. These individuals, families, and communities will rely on the nation's leading home care agencies to continue to attract and train a workforce that effectively collaborates—with clients, families, and healthcare partners—to resolve the most pressing dementia-related challenges in the places their clients call home.

When accepting such a weighty challenge, it is important to keep in mind that program development is an ongoing, comprehensive process involving consistent environmental scanning, planning, trying new approaches, and evaluating results to inform next steps. The good news is this change process is well underway, and lessons from the previous generation shine light on the path ahead. For instance, the home care industry already has many of the tools needed for the job (e.g. proven dementia care strategies are well-known, and many home care workers come to the job with a repertoire of dementia-specific knowledge). Yet a gap still exists. Prior research points to the most-timely question: *which training designs will best support home care teams translating their knowledge and skills into practice in the care environment for the good of their clients and themselves?* DementiaWise® has emerged as such a solution. The data from this study bring important implications for program developers who wish to develop a more dementia-capable workforce while reducing the team's risk for burnout.

In synthesizing the quantitative and qualitative data from this program evaluation, the positive impact of DementiaWise® on a diverse group of home care workers can be summarized as follows:



Perhaps some of the most positive news from this research is that home care companies can take definitive steps to improve workforce training for the entire home care team. They can realize positive outcomes for their employees and the clients they serve through a new approach to program development. Specifically, the authors recommend designing training programs that:

- Target the whole team
- Depict the contexts of home care
- Use challenging cases to situate real-world problem-solving
- Pin knowledge and skills to the case for just-in-time application
- Highlight team communication, collaboration, and cooperation

The agencies that succeed will be those that deploy short- and long-term changes to their training approach. Short term changes involve producing new research-informed training content, making the training easily accessible to all team members, and proactively addressing the fact that translating knowledge from the training to practice will require process experts and related supplemental materials. The longer-range changes involve expanding the library of content available in their programs and supporting the uptake by teams company-wide so that progress made, or lessons learned in one setting can support the development of a more dementia-capable workforce nationwide. In this way, the team involved with creating DementiaWise® recognizes the need to continue program development efforts as a means of performance improvement, expand on the most effective elements of the program, and collaborate with research partners on data-driven program evaluation to adapt as needs change. ComForCare/At Your Side Home Care and Partnerships for Health intend to continue the conversation and bring along like-minded experts in the process of improving and disseminating dementia care training.

Testimonials

“With the new DementiaWise® program, home care agencies are empowering caregivers to engage with families and colleagues in a collaborative process of collecting knowledge (both information and hands-on skills), sharing it with each other, and calling on it to resolve everyday challenges in the home with teamwork.”

—Dr. Heather McKay, Partnerships for Health

“As the demand for high-quality in-home dementia care grows, the home care industry must respond with data-driven evaluations which demonstrate the impact of different on-the-job training programs and inform future workforce development. In doing so, ComForCare is actively creating a more dementia-capable workforce and supporting people living with the disease and their families to live *longer, safer, and happier* in their communities, while simultaneously improving work-life for their teams.”

—Stephanie Wierzbicka, Manager of Strategic Health Programs, ComForCare

Contact Information

DementiaWise® training is available for ComForCare agencies nationwide and Best Life Brand partners. For more information, visit [comforcare.com/dementiawise-home-care-services](https://www.comforcare.com/dementiawise-home-care-services).

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About ComForCare

ComForCare and At Your Side Home Care is a premier provider of in-home care with over 215 locations across the U.S. and Canada. ComForCare offers a variety of in-home care services to fit the needs of clients and their families. It is ComForCare's goal to provide companionship and assistance with everyday activities to ensure seniors can live safely and securely in the comfort of home. Whether a client's health concerns are due to illness, injury, or aging, ComForCare's personal home care packages and flexible scheduling allow clients to maintain a sense of freedom, dignity, and connection to friends and family. Seniors who choose to stay at home are often happier, healthier, and recover faster from illness or injury than those living in residential care facilities—ComForCare makes independent living possible with a little extra help.

ComForCare and At Your Side Home Care Are Certified as a **Great Place To Work®**.
Learn more at www.comforcare.com.

About Partnerships for Health

Directed by Dr. Heather McKay, Partnerships for Health is a consulting company offering education and consultation to individuals, families, and organizations dealing with dementia. Dr. McKay is an occupational therapist, dementia care specialist, and international trainer and speaker on topics related to dementia care and caregiver education. In 2016, the Alzheimer's Foundation of America named Heather "Dementia Care Professional of the Year." Since 2019, Heather and ComForCare have enjoyed a partnership—together producing the highest-quality dementia care education for home care employees, clients, and local communities. Learn more about Dr. Heather McKay, Partnerships for Health, and dementia care education at www.pfhnc.com.

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