

Cognitive Care Advocacy Supports Older Adults and Family Caregivers

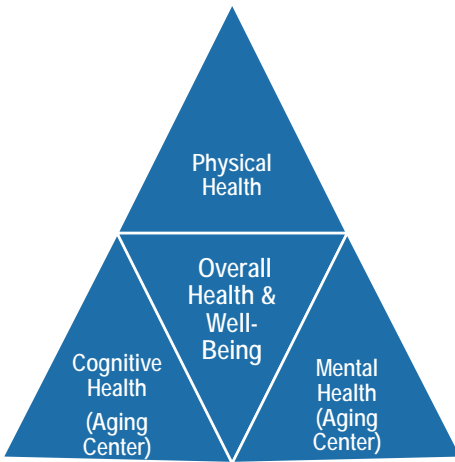
An Innovative Community Project Funded by
NextFifty Initiative



Since 1999, UCSS Aging Center has shared its specialization in geriatric care by providing needed services and promoting community efforts

For Older Adults and Family Caregivers
Recognizing and Celebrating Resilience Together

What Is Cognitive Health and Why Is It Important?



Cognitive Health refers to the ability to clearly think, learn and remember. Good cognitive health helps us to function at our best, even more so as we age. It is discussed less often than physical and mental health, but it is an important contributor to our overall health and wellness.

Early Detection

Too few older adults are getting the benefit of early cognitive assessments, according to a 2020 USC Schaeffer Center study. Early detection through screening is important when cognitive abilities such as attention, organization and planning, learning and memory, language, visual perception, social cognition and judgment are compromised. Possible causes of poor cognition can include hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol, substance use, depression, anxiety, poor sleep, or a neurological condition such as Alzheimer's disease. When early brief screens detect areas of concern, it is critical that older adults and families are aware of options for next steps such as neuropsychological (and/or capacity) evaluations.

New Resource for Older Adults and Caregivers: Cognitive Care Advocate (CCA)

The Aging Center identified the need for a new support position and obtained funding from NextFifty Initiative to engage and train a Cognitive Care Advocate (CCA) for supporting older adults and/or their families. A majority of clients served (some with caregiver responsibilities) expressed deep appreciation for the CCA service.

Highlights of What We Learned:

- Social-emotional and navigation support provided by a **Cognitive Care Advocate (CCA)** was beneficial for follow-through with Psychologist's *recommendations* (based on Neuropsychological Evaluation Report).
- With assistance of a CCA, the likelihood of establishing care with a neurologist or cardiologist and other providers, use of memory aids and strategies, and participating in support groups increased.
- Barriers in accessing medical services included unclear communication and processes, lack of sensitivity when coordinating care, and delayed care.
- Care plan success for many clients with neurocognitive disorder often occurred with intersecting, layered support and care coordination from clients, caregivers, and/or families who engaged well.
- When caregivers accessed caregiver family therapy, they experienced feeling heard, a sense of relief and valuable skill building.

Why Is Cognitive Care Advocate (CCA) Intervention So Important?

The Aging Center demonstrated that older adults and their caregivers could benefit from the unique follow-up service by a compassionate "thought partner," the CCA, who helped with their prescribed wellness *recommendations* and barriers to care.

Clients described the positive impact the CCA made when they:

- discussed and prioritized *recommendations*
- needed an advocate or someone to help investigate resources
- adjusted to adapt and plan for the future
- experienced fears of "what's next" after learning about neurocognitive disorder diagnosis

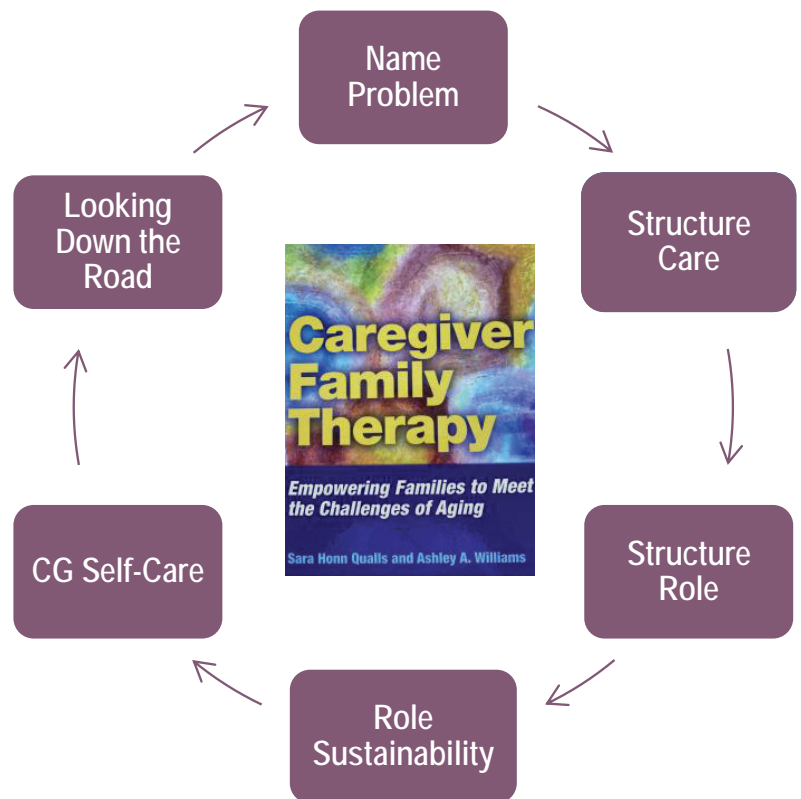
A Concerning Picture of Unpaid Caregivers for Older Adults in Colorado

Research by Bell Policy in 2020 not only projected a 115,000-person caregiver gap in Colorado by 2030, but also that between 2020 and 2030, one million caregivers will need additional services and supports.

Caregiver Family Therapy (CFT) Model by Dr. Sara Qualls

Dr. Sara Qualls, Kraemer Family Professor of Aging Studies at UCCS and a pioneer in the care of older adults and family caregivers, has been training Geropsychology student-clinicians since the inception of the Aging Center in 1999.

Dr. Qualls illustrates the adaptations of a family managing declining function of a family member as: naming the problem, role structuring, and caregiver (CG) self-care. This model has helped numerous family caregivers cope with the demands of caregiving in ways that promote compassion for self, loved ones, and others. As we live longer, we will all need care from others at some point in our lives and offer care to others as well.



Obtained with permission from Dr. Sara Qualls - Qualls, S. H., and Williams, A. A. (2013). *Caregiver Family Therapy: Empowering Families to Meet the Challenges of Aging*. APA Press.

For Providers and Community Partners
What Can You Do To Advance Caregiver Resiliency?

UCCS Aging Center Partners Playing a Leadership Role In Older Adult and Caregiver Advocacy

NextFifty Initiative - A Colorado-based private foundation dedicated to funding mission-driven initiatives that improve the lives of the older adult population and their caregivers.

<https://www.next50initiative.org>

UCCS Psychology Department - Supports UCCS Aging Center with faculty who supervise graduate student-clinicians and conduct research on older adult cognitive functioning and mental health. <https://psychology.uccs.edu>

UCCS Gerontology Center – Engages in efforts to promote research, outreach and connectedness within the Pikes Peak region's community of agencies and resources serving older adults. <https://geron.uccs.edu>

UCCS Helen and Arthur E. Johnson Beth-El College of Nursing and Health Sciences – Trains exceptional nurses and healthcare professionals and builds healthier communities. <https://johnsonbethel.uccs.edu>

UCCS Social Work Department – Transforms lives, improves our communities, makes a difference, and fuels the future. <https://spa.uccs.edu/programs/social-work>

UCCS HealthCircle Center For Active Living (CAL) – Engages the community in physical activity and wellness programs to improve health. <https://healthcircle.uccs.edu/center-for-active-living>

Alzheimer's Association – Leads the fight against Alzheimer's disease and other dementias by increasing the understanding of the disease and its impact on the person, family and community, and promoting the advancement of research. <https://www.alz.org>

Bell Policy Center – Commits to ensuring economic mobility for every Coloradan through research, outreach, and advocacy. <https://www.bellpolicy.org>

Health Promotion Partners – Provides evaluations by occupational, physical and speech language therapists to support aging in place. <https://www.healthpromotionpartners.com>

Innovations in Aging Collaborative (IIAC) – Plans strategically for our community to become an age friendly region that is welcoming and open to citizens of all ages and encourages a maximum quality of life. <https://innovationsinaging.org>

Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments (PPACG) – Home to the Pikes Peak Area Agency on Aging and the Aging Family Caregiver Support Center. Helps adults aged 60 and older and their caregivers navigate available services and resources to remain independent through partnerships with community-based resources. <https://www.ppacg.org/aging>

Pikes Peak Elder Justice Center (PPEJC) – Prevents and eliminates elder abuse in the Pikes Peak region and beyond. <https://www.pikespeakelderjusticecenter.org>

Geropsychology services require specialty training. Many professionals lack the proficiency and may not be aware of important concerns or needs of older adults. Care professionals are encouraged to seek training opportunities and consult with colleagues who have the related knowledge and skills. The **UCCS Gerontology Center** offers a **Professional Advancement Certificate in Gerontology** (<https://geron.uccs.edu/education/professional-certificate>). The program is for those interested in learning more about working with older adults, are involved personally with caregiving, or have an interest in aging issues. It also offers sensitivity training that celebrates the diverse needs of the community.

For more information visit our website or contact us:

<https://healthcircle.uccs.edu/aging-center>

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