

# THEN & NOW

*“Care coordination is a key to the Project’s success. Building partnerships and providing specialized, dementia-specific training to care managers within health plans are critical components.”*



THE ROSALINDE AND ARTHUR  
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## 2016 WINNER FOR POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Alzheimer’s Greater Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, California

**PROGRAM:** Dementia Cal MediConnect Project

### Groundbreaking Partnerships Between Health Plans and Community Organizations Improve Dementia Care

**INTRODUCTION:** Caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease or another dementia can be a daunting proposition. Beyond hands-on assistance with bathing, dressing, medications and food preparation, family caregivers manage healthcare paperwork, medical equipment, doctor and hospital visits, transportation, finances, and a vast number of additional tasks.

In the case of “dual eligibles”—people who qualify for both Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) and Medicare—the caregiving job can be further complicated by a confusing array of health coverage issues, payments, and interrupted care. This confusion can affect the quality of care delivered to persons with dementia, and can raise already high stress levels in caregivers. Costs of care, coexisting health conditions, and the potential need for nursing home placement factor in as well.

A California program developed in 2013 sought to utilize a range of strategies to change this dynamic. The **Dementia Cal MediConnect Project (CMC)** works to improve access to quality healthcare and supports for low-income and ethnically diverse people with dementia by:

- ▶ Providing technical assistance to health plans;
- ▶ Training their care managers; and
- ▶ Providing support and disease education to patients and their caregivers.

Community-based Alzheimer’s organizations now partner with a variety of health plans to improve dementia care. The work is in collaboration with the California Department of Aging, Alzheimer’s Greater Los Angeles (ALZGLA), the Alzheimer’s Association Northern California, Alzheimer’s San Diego, and ten health plans in six California counties. To help ensure quality care in the home, family caregivers are identified and their needs are assessed. Access to Medi-Cal and Medicare benefits is simplified and integrated, including medical care, behavioral health, and long-term care services and supports. Additional services such as transportation and expanded vision and dental services may be offered as well.

**MOVING FORWARD:** These strategies have led to remarkable progress. With the help of the **Rosalinde Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer’s Disease Caregiving Legacy Award**, the Project’s promising practices are being replicated and lessons learned are being shared. Project staff have made presentations at national conferences, while the increased visibility has helped strengthen ties with participating health plans and federal and state funders.

Three national webinars, two funded through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and one through the American Society on Aging and the Administration

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for Community Living's National Alzheimer's Resource Center, have shared promising practices, and two peer-reviewed journal articles have been published about the Project. Three health plans, all with a national presence, have embedded validated cognitive screening tools and/or caregiver assessment tools into their electronic care management systems, creating opportunities to change workflow processes, communication strategies and care coordination.

The Dementia Cal MediConnect Project has been recognized as a "Promising Practice" by the State of California, CMS, the National Alzheimer's Plan Advisory Group, and the John A. Hartford Foundation's Change AGENTS Dementia Caregiving Network.

Additionally, and as a direct result of this work, the State of Rhode Island has included a mandate for dementia care specialists in their contracts with health plans implementing the Financial Realignment Demonstration. The state of Texas has acquired federal funds to replicate the care manager training programs in their state's demonstration. Alzheimer's groups in Maryland, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia have requested the training materials and instruction on advocating with health plans.

**WHAT'S NEXT?** The Legacy Award also provided impetus to ALZGLA and its partners to convene the California Dementia Healthcare Summit in May 2018, bringing together champions of quality geriatric care to begin implementing tools and proven strategies within their organizations to improve care for families affected by dementia.

The Summit is not envisioned as a one-time event: ALZGLA plans to work with health-care systems over a multi-year period post-Summit. And with the security of the Award funding, the program also embarked on a new Dementia Healthcare Initiative, which will follow up with attendees and bring information from the original project to new health-care organizations.

According to Debra Cherry, PhD, Executive Vice President, Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles, "Identifying key dementia champions at health plans and within state and federal agencies provides the building blocks for successful partnerships and sustainable relationships. Changing systems of care requires patience and persistence. It is often an iterative process that can be slow and challenging. However, the outcomes can be great for families affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias."

The Dementia Cal MediConnect Project shows how community-based Alzheimer's organizations can partner with health plans to improve dementia care more widely. Lessons learned from this Project have the ability to impact quality dementia care nationwide.

Many thanks to Dr. Debra Cherry and Jennifer Schlesinger for contributing information about the program's progress since receiving the Caregiving Legacy Award. For further information, visit [www.alzгла.org/professionals](http://www.alzгла.org/professionals) or contact: Debra Cherry, PhD, Executive Vice President, Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles, [dcherry@alzгла.org](mailto:dcherry@alzгла.org) or Jennifer Schlesinger, MPH, CHES, Director, Professional Training & Healthcare Services, Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles, [jschlesinger@alzгла.org](mailto:jschlesinger@alzгла.org).

**ABOUT THE AWARDS:** The Rosalinde Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer's Disease Caregiving Legacy Awards program recognizes organizations that exemplify creativity, dedication, innovation, and outstanding practices for supporting Alzheimer's disease caregivers.

In partnership with Family Caregiver Alliance, three awards of \$20,000 each are made to programs or projects based in nonprofit organizations, government agencies, or universities in the continental United States (and Hawaii) that respond to the needs of family/informal caregivers of adults with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. For more information, visit [www.caregiver.org/gilbert-awards](http://www.caregiver.org/gilbert-awards).



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