

Guiding Families and Caregivers Dealing with Dementia: Medicare's New GUIDE Program

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If you are caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, you already know how overwhelming the journey can be. Between doctor visits, medications, daily routines, and the emotional toll on the family, it can feel totally overwhelming, patching together resources and support. Medicare has finally recognized just how hard this journey is for the patient and the caregiver and recently launched the GUIDE Program (Guiding an Improved Dementia Experience).

The GUIDE program was developed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and its purpose is to provide comprehensive and coordinated care for people living with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, while also offering much-needed support for the caregiver, who shoulders most of the day-to-day responsibilities. GUIDE was designed to improve the quality of life, enabling individuals to stay in their homes and communities longer while also reducing the strain on families by integrating medical, social, and community resources into a cohesive plan. Instead of leaving families to figure things out alone, GUIDE now offers a way to connect you with a care team and a dedicated dementia care navigator.

When you enroll in GUIDE, the program starts with a thorough assessment of your loved one's needs, as well as yours, as a caregiver. From there, the care team works to create a plan that covers both medical and day-to-day support. Every participant in the program is connected with a dementia care "navigator," someone who helps coordinate services and create individualized care plans, which are updated as needs evolve. That plan might include help with managing medications, guidance on connecting to community services like transportation or meal programs, or even just having someone to call when you need advice. GUIDE also includes education and coaching for the caregiver so that they can feel more confident in their caregiving role. The care team also manages transitions and offers around-the-clock access to provide guidance in moments of crisis.

The best part of the GUIDE program is that it is free. To participate, your loved one must be enrolled in traditional Medicare and have a formal diagnosis of dementia. They cannot already be in hospice care, living in a nursing facility, or enrolled in certain other programs, such as Medicare Advantage or PACE. GUIDE's focus is on people living and remaining in the community, where support is often the most fragmented and where families typically struggle to navigate a confusing array of resources.

What makes this program especially unique is that it puts caregivers at the center of the care plan. Medicare has long covered medical services, but this is one of the first times it has stepped in to consider long-term care and recognize and support the unpaid family members and friends who provide most of the hands-on care. GUIDE acknowledges what caregivers already know: that supporting the caregiver is essential to supporting the person with dementia.

Since the program is still new, not every provider is currently offering it. To determine if GUIDE is an option for your family, you should check with your loved one's primary care physician or reach out to your local [Alzheimer's Association chapter](#).

While GUIDE is just beginning, it has the potential to make a real difference for families. Instead of feeling alone in the maze of dementia care, families will have someone helping to coordinate, guide, and support. For caregivers in the Sandwich Generation who are often stretched to their limits, that extra layer of help means less stress, fewer crises, and more time to focus on what really matters: spending meaningful moments with the person they love.