

Massachusetts Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias Online Training Program 2017

**Final Evaluation Report from Boston University
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**Center for Aging and Disability
Education and Research**
Boston University School of Social Work

I. INTRODUCTION

Boston University's Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER), in partnership with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA), created and delivered an online course on *Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias* to aging providers across Massachusetts. The number of older adults living with dementia is projected to increase dramatically over the coming decades. EOEA is committed to promoting health, independence, and resilience for individuals with dementia and their families. This training program provided Information and Referral specialists, Options Counselors, Councils on Aging outreach staff, and other partners in the Massachusetts No Wrong Door (NWD) system with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to identify potential cognitive impairment or dementia in its early stages, communicate with individuals with dementia, refer for screening, and connect individuals with available Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) that best meet the needs of a family caring for someone with Alzheimer's Disease or Related Disorder (ADRD). Learners who completed all online coursework earned **4 CEUs** and a **Certificate of Completion** from Boston University's Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research.

II. RESULTS

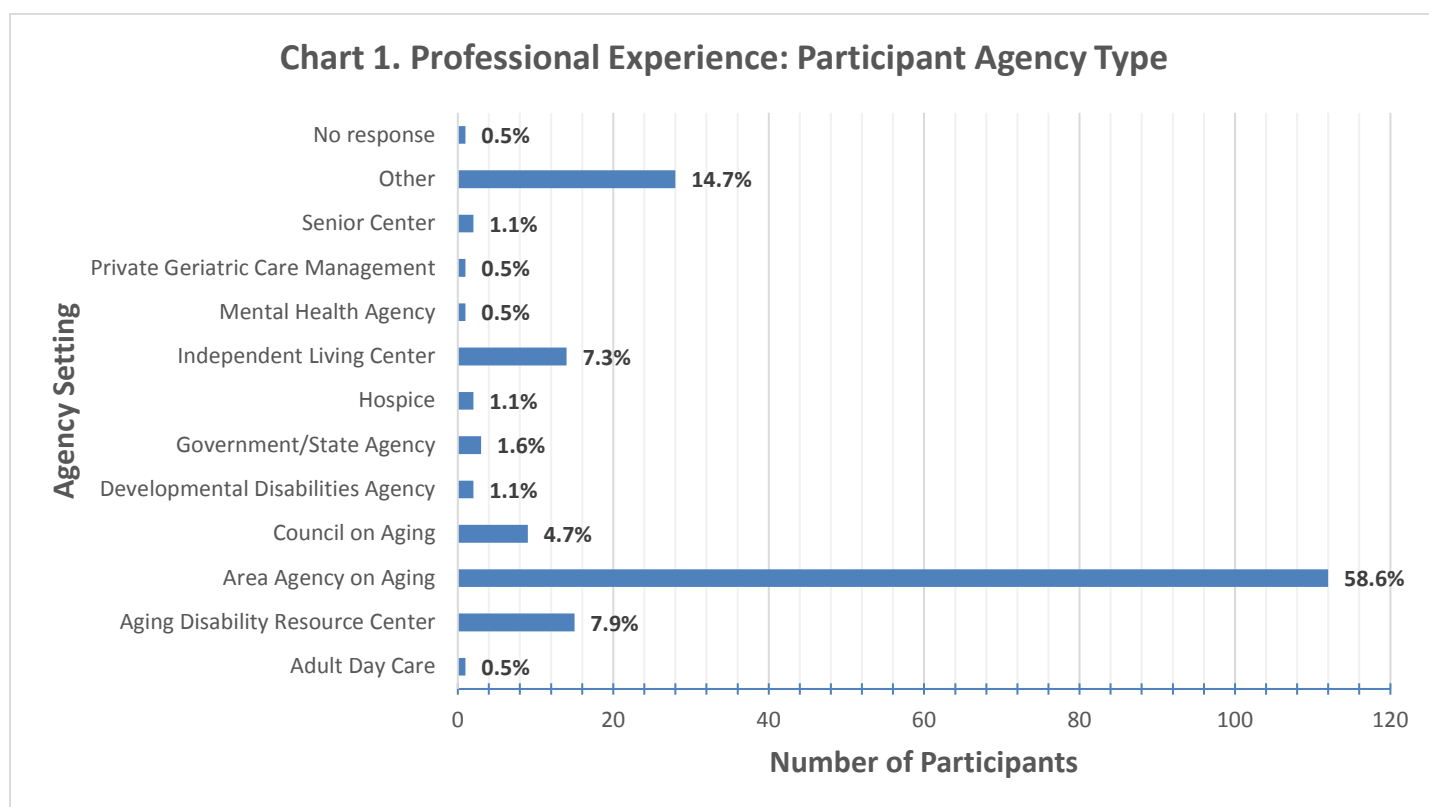
Demographics

One hundred ninety-nine (199) participants were expected to enroll in program. Of those, one hundred ninety-five (195) enrolled in the program, and one hundred ninety-one (191) participants completed the program and received the *Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias* certificate of completion (96% completion rate).

The average age of the participants was 47-years-old, and 91% identified as female. Eighty percent (80%) of participants self-identified as White/Non-Hispanic, eleven percent (11%) self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, and four percent (4%) self-identified as African-American/Black.

The majority of participants had a Bachelor's degree or higher (79%). Participants reported they work in a variety of settings but the majority, fifty-nine percent (59%) of participants, said they work for an Area Agency on Aging. A full breakdown of the type of agency in which participants work is shown in Chart 1 on the following page.

Additionally, participants reported they hold a wide variety of roles in their agencies. The most common role was Information & Referral which accounted for a total of twenty-seven percent of training participants (24.1% Specialists, 3.1% Managers). The second most common role among participants was Options Counselor which accounted for fifteen percent (15%).

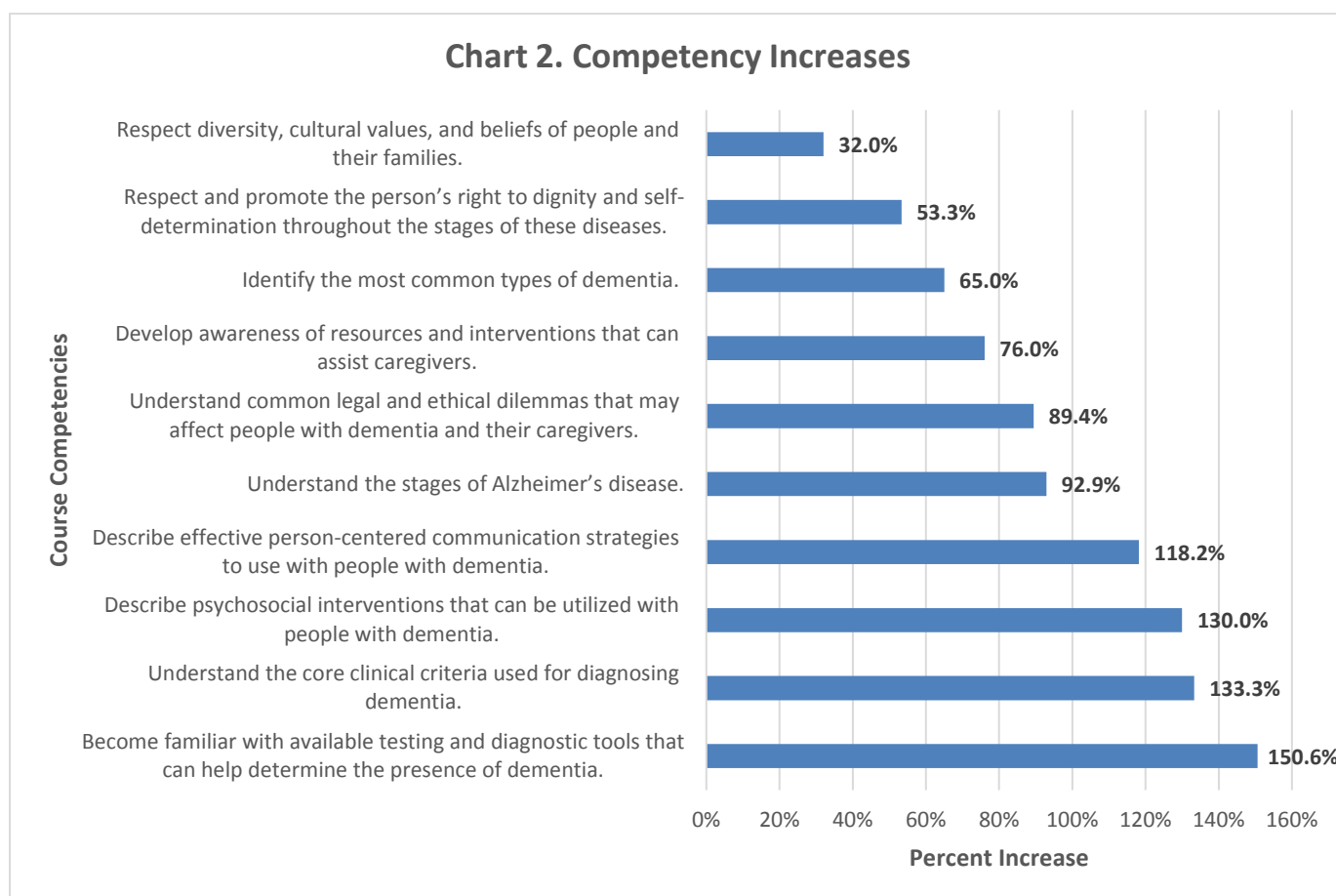
Chart 1. Professional Experience: Participant Agency Type

ONLINE COURSE RESULTS: ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND OTHER DEMENTIAS

Course Competencies

CADER collected pre and post-competency measurements for each training participant based on the key competencies in the *Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementia* course. The purpose of this analysis was to measure participants' competency level prior to and after their training to determine baseline and changes in competency level in relation to participation in the online training program. Results show that increases in the mean scores from pre-test to post-test were statistically significant across all of the ten learning competencies and increases ranged from 32.0% to 150.6% ($p < .05$).

The percent increases in the mean scores from pre-test to post-test across all of the ten learning competencies are illustrated in the Chart 2 below.



As noted from the results, there were significant gains in key areas, such as understanding the diagnostic criteria and tools available to help determine the presence of dementia. Also, importantly, participants learned more about appropriate psychosocial interventions and the importance of using person-centered communication and planning as the core method of interactions with people. These findings support the main goals of this training effort to create a dementia capable staff and to further the aims of building dementia friendly communities.

Course Evaluations

CADER collected data upon completion of the course asking training participants to rate whether the course objectives were met, whether the course expanded their knowledge and understanding of the topic area, and whether the course will help them apply the skills learned into their practice with clients. Participants rated the course very positively.

- Ninety-eight percent (98%) agreed or strongly agreed ***the training expanded their knowledge and understanding in the topic area.***
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) agreed or strongly agreed ***the training would help them apply practice skills in the topic area.***

- Ninety-seven percent (97%) agreed or strongly agreed *the training will help them in their work with older adults and/or with people with disabilities.*

We also asked participants to share open-ended responses regarding their thoughts about the course. Some of the feedback for this course is listed below.

- “This was an excellent, adult friendly course. The information was not overwhelming, easy to follow, and clear. This again, is a wonderful way for working adults to learn and put into practice the material, due to its practicality. Thank you for offering this course. I believe this should be presented to HHA, caregivers, family members, church priests, etc. This is a wonderful tool with rich context and resources. The videos we amazing as well. Thank you.”
- “I thoroughly enjoyed the course. I loved the way it was presented. The videos added to the course. I liked the fact that the objectives were clearly written out in the beginning. I hope to be able to go back to review the course again. I am sure I would gain even a better understanding by reviewing the information and checking out the resources listed. All in all, great!”
- “I have taken various trainings and workshops related to Alzheimer’s Disease but this by far was the best course I have taken. I feel very confident that I now know more about this disease and understand what it feels like to care for someone with this and also what it feels like to have the disease and how it progresses.”
- “Wonderful course...There is so much valuable information included I found myself reading articles and watching the videos suggested. They were very helpful but took time. I enjoyed every minute spent. I feel I have so much more to offer my clients and families now. Thank you”
- “I loved the course and would absolutely recommend it to others. Great information and resources on helping people with memory impairments. We run a Memory Cafe at our senior center and the information I gained from this course will definitely be helpful in running the cafe. I would be interested in taking other courses like this in the future. Thank you for the opportunity!”
- “I loved that the interactive course content incorporated all learning styles and reinforced topics covered in each section. The online course was extremely easy to use and I would recommended it to other staff members as a CEU / training option.”
- “I felt this course was very beneficial and will help me within my day to day work.”

SIX-MONTH TRAINING FOLLOW-UP SURVEY RESULTS

The transfer of learning is the degree to which learners apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes learned in training when they return to the job, and the degree to which new learning is maintained over time. In order to gain this information on the long-term impact of the training on the workforce, organization, and population they serve, we distributed a follow-up survey six months post-completion to assess the degree to which new learning is applied and maintained over time. The follow-up survey included questions related to the following: participants’ *knowledge and abilities, training satisfaction/dissatisfaction, training learning competencies, furthers training needs*. Seventy-nine of the 191 participants who completed the online training completed the follow-up survey (41.4% completion rate).

Knowledge and Abilities

In summary, the vast majority of training participants (75%) felt that ***the online training expanded their knowledge of dementia*** either “a lot”, or “to a great extent” and (65%) felt that ***the online training improved their confidence in working with people with dementia***. The majority of training participants (72%) felt that ***the online training improved their confidence in working with caregivers of people with dementia*** either “a lot”, or “to a great extent”, while 68% felt that ***they retained*** either “almost all of the knowledge”, or “a lot of the knowledge” ***from the online training***. The majority of training participants (59%) felt that ***in the past six months, the online training improved their work with people with dementia*** either “a lot”, or “to a great extent” and 59% felt that ***in the past six months, the online training improved their work with people with caregivers of people with dementia***

Importantly, most training participants (63%) felt that ***the online training taught them what to do differently when caring for people with dementia*** either “a lot”, or “to a great extent”. Also, 71% felt that ***the online training increased their understanding of how to address the behaviors related to dementia*** either “a lot”, or “to a great extent”.

In terms of frequency of interactions with people who have dementia-related issues, 63% stated that they ***worked with people on dementia-related issues*** at least “once a week” ***in the past six months***. When asked questions about how this training impacted their job and agency, the majority of participants (87%) felt that ***they think their agency expects them to use the training in their work*** and 75% felt that ***the online training was*** either “very useful” or “extremely useful” ***to their job***.

Training Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

Participants were asked a series of questions related to the degree to which they were satisfied/dissatisfied with the training after having completed the online training. Overwhelming, participants (96%) were either “very satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” ***with the online training*** and 72% ***rated the length of the online training*** “about right”.

Participants were also asked ***what [they] liked most about the online training***. The most common response was that they liked the ***self-paced online format of the training, including the design that divided the training into manageable segments, and included many interactive elements and videos*** (66%). The following are some participant comments related to this theme:

- “The online format was easy to use and I could log in whenever it was convenient for me.”
- “I liked the interactive activities and tests. It helped to retain the information.”
- “The program was very easy to navigate.”
- “It was broken down into doable segments.”
- “I liked the self-pace and the easy to work with modules.”
- “I liked the idea that I could do as much as I wanted each time I went online, and I could go back to review some of the materials. Being able to go at my own pace was very helpful.”
- “Changes in pace, interactive videos and personal accounts, case studies and quizzes kept me alert and participating/learning.”

The second most common response participants gave when asked this same question *what [they] liked most about the online training* was that they enjoyed the **knowledge they gained about Alzheimer's and other dementias** (21%). The following are some participant comments related to this theme:

- “All I knew before was the disease of Alzheimer's, I never knew there were different types of dementia and how to react to the different types. I found the training to be very enlightening and I enjoyed learning about this disease.”
- “Expanded understanding of different aspects of the condition and treatment.”
- “I thought it was the best online dementia course I ever took. Really well done and comprehensive.”
- “It gave me a good sense of the scope of dementia and positive ways to interact with elders with dementia.”
- “I learned things about dementia that I wasn't previously aware of.”

Participants were then asked *what could have been improved in the online training?* The most common response was **no changes should be made to the online training, the training was good as is** (45%). The following are some participant comments related to this theme:

- “I feel the training was well done.”
- “I don't think many improvements need to be made.”

Competencies

Participants were asked to rate their competency on four of items they responded to prior to beginning the course and immediately after completion. These competencies are related to the knowledge, skills, and values needed to work with older adults with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and their caregivers. Increases in the mean scores from pre-test to post-test were statistically significant across all of the learning competencies (as shown in Chart 2 above) and these scores remained statistically significant when training participants completed the follow-up survey at six months post training ($p < .05$). These gains suggest that the online training did in fact have a long-term impact on training program participants' knowledge, skills, and values. The following are the four competency items participants' rated themselves on pre-online training, immediately post-online training, and six months later in the follow-up survey.

1. Understand the stages of Alzheimer's disease.
2. Describe effective person-centered communication strategies to use with people with dementia.
3. Describe psychosocial interventions that can be used with people with dementia.
4. Respect diversity, cultural values, and beliefs of people and their families.

Further Training Needs

Participants were asked a series of questions related to their further training needs with working with people with dementia and their caregivers after having completed the online training. The results show, for the most part, training participants were interested in additional online resources more than in-person training resources. This coincides with

participants' satisfaction with the flexibility the online training offered due to being self-paced and allowing them to participate at times that were most convenient for them. A summary of findings is as follows:

- 57% were “very interested” in *additional online dementia training*.
- 64% were NOT “very interested” in *additional in-person dementia training*.
- 71% were NOT “very interested” in *role-play exercises to further support their work with people with dementia and their caregivers*.
- 50% were “very interested” in *demonstrations showing how to work with people with dementia and their caregivers*.
- 66% were NOT “very interested” in *online case consultation with a dementia specialist to further support their work with people with dementia and their caregivers*.
- 73% were NOT “very interested” in *in-person case consultation with a dementia specialist to further support their work with people with dementia and their caregivers*.
- The majority of participants were only “somewhat interested” in an *online forum to discuss dementia with others* (51%).
- The majority of participants were only “somewhat interested” in an *in-person discussions with peers on dementia* (52%).
- The majority of training participants (78%) were “very interested” in a *list of online resources that provide helpful information on dementia*.
- Nearly half of training participants (46%) were “somewhat interested” in having *additional staff in [their] agency to work with people with dementia and caregivers*.

III. SUMMARY

Participants in the online program reported that they learned a great deal of relevant information about Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias that they will use in their work. Highlights include:

- Increases in the mean scores from pre-test to post-test were statistically significant across all of the ten learning competencies ($p < .05$).
- Ninety-eight percent (98%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed they can *describe the best ways of communicating with people who have dementia*.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed they can *describe how the environment can be adapted to meet the physical and psychosocial needs of people with Alzheimer's disease*.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed they *understand the need for psychosocial interventions and support for caregivers*.
- On average, 95% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the course learning objectives were met.
- Ninety-eight percent (98%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed *they would recommend this course to their colleagues*.
- Ninety-seven percent (97%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed *the information in this course was effectively presented*.

- Participants' responses to the follow-up survey clearly indicated they liked the online, self-paced format of the training and would welcome further online training opportunities.
- Increases in the mean scores from pre-test to post-test were statistically significant across all of the learning competencies and remained statistically significant when training participants completed the follow-up survey at six months post training ($p < .05$).

Based on these results, the online course was well received by training participants and helped tremendously in building their knowledge and skills in key content areas. As the number of people with Alzheimer's Disease and dementia increases, it is becoming more critical than ever that we have a workforce that is trained and knowledgeable and who have the tools needed to support the person and their family. Through this course created and delivered by CADER and through the efforts of EOEA, we have made substantial impact in supporting this workforce and improving care. A challenge that lies ahead is how to continue to educate new workers as they enter the workforce and keep current workers' skills updated with new information. We look forward to working with EOEA to meet this challenge and continuing our workforce training efforts to positively impact the lives of older adults and people with disabilities.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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