

CALIFORNIA LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

New Cognitive Health Assessment and Warmline Help Practitioners Identify Dementia

SACRAMENTO — Primary care providers in California have a new dementia screening tool, the [cognitive health assessment](#), available to help identify cognitive decline in their patients (age 65 and older) and determine next steps. Dementia Care Aware, a statewide initiative led by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), provides training on this new assessment and support through a warmline to help primary care providers successfully screen for dementia in older adults.

“Dementia Care Aware gives primary care teams the tools and support they need to screen for and support patients living with dementia,” said **Jacey Cooper, California’s State Medicaid Director and DHCS Chief Deputy Director for Health Care Programs**. “As the third leading cause of death in California, dementia is a common condition that must be diagnosed and managed with compassion and excellence.”

“Dementia Care Aware is an important part of California’s Master Plan for Aging, which is reimagining programs and services for older adults,” said **Susan DeMarois, Director of the California Department of Aging**. “Early dementia screening will be even more critical in future years, as the disease often goes undetected for long stretches of time. This widespread screening and detection will allow people to make medical, financial, and other decisions and strengthen their support systems.”

Dementia Care Aware offers a free [online training](#) on the cognitive health assessment and other relevant dementia care topics. The cognitive health assessment training teaches providers how to use the tool to screen for dementia and then proceed to the appropriate next steps in assessment and care planning. In addition to the free online core training, Dementia Care Aware offers other educational resources, including online modules, webinars, podcasts, and videos, many of which provide free Continuing Medical Education/Continuing Education/Maintenance of Certification credits for clinicians.

“Dementia Care Aware is making screening for dementia doable and empowering primary care providers with the tools, training, and resources they need to feel comfortable with the next steps in dementia care and management,” said **Anna Chodos, M.D., M.P.H., Associate Professor of Medicine at University of California, San Francisco and Executive Director of Dementia Care Aware**. “It’s increasingly a skill and clinical pathway we need as our health care systems care for more and more people living with dementia, and we must support them and the caregivers in their lives.”

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT: Dementia Care Aware, in partnership with dementia experts from multiple University of California campuses, is a bold attempt to improve detection and care for people living with dementia. Dementia Care Aware understands that brain health is whole person health, and as the incidence and prevalence of dementia is expected to grow in California, the initiative will help primary care teams detect and care for people with dementia and their caregivers. When someone has cognitive symptoms and functional decline, recognizing this and knowing how best to support them is vital to slowing further decline. Dementia Care Aware can equip all health care providers with the knowledge and resources to screen patients and make care plans.

COGNITIVE HEALTH ASSESSMENT: The cognitive health assessment is a dementia screening tool intended to be easy to administer by any member of a primary care team. For patients who only have Medi-Cal, providers can use Current Procedural Terminology code 1494F to bill for the cognitive health assessment, and for patients with Medicare, the assessment can be incorporated as part of an Annual Wellness Visit and billed using G0438/G0439. The assessment involves:

1. A brief patient history using simple questions that can be administered in the most common languages spoken by older Californians.
2. Validated [screening tools](#) to assess cognition (mini cog, GP cog, etc.) and function (ADL, AIDL checklists) that can be given to the patient or an informant.
3. Documentation of the patient's support system.

WARMLINE SERVICE: Dementia Care Aware offers free clinical support on the cognitive health assessment through a warmline phone service for clinicians and primary care teams. Dementia experts provide education and decision-making consultation regarding dementia screening, assessment, diagnosis, management, and care planning. Experts can answer questions that arise during any part of dementia care and give guidance about how clinicians and primary care teams can make systems changes in their practice. The warmline can be reached at 1-800-933-1789 Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. PDT. Voicemail messages left after hours will be returned the next business day.

MORE INFORMATION: The cognitive health assessment can also be part of the Medicare Annual Wellness Visit. If the patient screens positive on the cognitive health assessment, then a more in-depth evaluation can be done, as recommended by Medicare.

Additionally, Senate Bill 48 (Chapter 484, Statutes of 2021) expands the Medi-Cal schedule of benefits to include an annual cognitive health assessment for Medi-Cal members who are 65 years of age and older if they are otherwise ineligible for a similar assessment as part of an annual wellness visit through the Medicare program.

More information about Dementia Care Aware and the cognitive health assessment tool and training are available at [DementiaCareAware.org](https://www.dementiacareaware.org).

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