



# CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS: MAKING A MEANINGFUL IMPACT

August 2014

This report summarizes the results of a province-wide evaluation of the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s caregiver support group program.

**Alzheimer Society**  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

At the Alzheimer Society of B.C., we continually work to improve how we support persons with dementia and their caregivers. Evaluating the impact of our education and support services is an important step in ensuring the quality and value of what we offer families living with dementia. In 2013-14, we conducted a province-wide evaluation of our caregiver support group program in partnership with an external consultant.



## About Alzheimer Society of B.C. Caregiver Support Groups

The caregiver support groups offered by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. are open to caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia. The person with dementia can be living either in the community or in a residential care facility. The caregiver may be living with or near the person with dementia, or in another location. Family members and friends directly or indirectly involved in the care and support of a person with dementia can join a caregiver support group.

The support groups use an *Information and Mutual Aid* model. This means that group members benefit from reliable information provided by Alzheimer Society of B.C. staff and volunteer facilitators, and from the experience and support of other group members who are also impacted by dementia.

Our caregiver support group program has grown significantly over time. Since 2005, there has been a 41 per cent increase in the number of caregiver support groups we offer across B.C.

## How We Evaluated the Caregiver Support Groups

There were several different components of this evaluation:

- Observations of some caregiver support groups.
- Review of published research about caregiver support groups.
- Confidential and anonymous questionnaires completed by 424 group members, 84 volunteer facilitators and all staff facilitators.
- Telephone interviews with a sample of current group members, exited group members and volunteer facilitators.
- Consultation with all Programs & Services staff and trainers for the volunteer facilitator program.

## What We Learned from Caregiver Support Group Members

"I was absolutely overwhelmed and fairly uninformed (I realize now) about Alzheimer's disease before I started attending this group. It has helped me sort out some of my own reactions to my father's decline and given me perspective and tools."

– Caregiver Support Group Member

We learned a lot about the members of the caregiver support groups:

- Almost 75 per cent are female.
- 50 per cent are living with the person with dementia.
- 78 per cent are over 60 years of age.
- 68 per cent are caring for a spouse.
- 32 per cent had been attending a caregiver support group for more than two years.

"The meetings give hope, help you carry on month to month, give positive ideas and put you in the right direction to overcome problems you may be experiencing."

– Caregiver Support Group Member



"It provides an invaluable meeting place for caregivers to share and say what they can't with family and friends. They can laugh and cry together. Without this they would be isolated."

– Volunteer Caregiver Support Group Facilitator

## Next Steps

The evaluation demonstrated very strong support from group members, volunteers and staff to continue offering caregiver support groups. We will work to improve the caregiver support group program in the following ways:

- Continue to improve training programs for volunteer facilitators.
- Develop tools to:
  - o Increase awareness of other Alzheimer Society of B.C. programs and services.
  - o Improve communication between volunteers and staff.
- Enhance support for members when they transition from a support group.
- Ensure helpful resources are available to bereaved caregivers.

We also learned that:

- 95 per cent of group members rated the support group facilitators as 'good' or 'excellent.'
- 92 per cent were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the support group they attend.
- 94 per cent 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the Alzheimer Society of B.C. should continue to offer support groups to family members and friends of individuals with dementia.

"It is very comforting to know you're not alone and to hear other people's experiences. It makes it so much easier to deal with your own situation."

– Caregiver Support Group Member

## What We Learned from Volunteer Facilitators

"It is a privilege to share in the caregiver's journey and to play a role in supporting them through this process."

– Volunteer Caregiver Support Group Facilitator



We learned that:

- 48 per cent of volunteers have been facilitating a caregiver support group for more than two years.
- 88 per cent of volunteers rated the training we provide as 'good' or 'excellent.'
- 90 per cent of volunteers rated the support they receive from staff as 'good' or 'excellent.'

## Thank You!

Thank you very much to all of the caregivers and volunteers who participated in this evaluation. Your contributions helped make it a success!

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Learn more about our caregiver support groups:  
[www.alzheimerbc.org/caregiver-support-groups.aspx](http://www.alzheimerbc.org/caregiver-support-groups.aspx)

For support groups in your area:

Call the Dementia Helpline at  
604-681-8651 or (toll-free) 1-800-936-6033  
or visit [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org)  
and click on In My Community  
to find the Alzheimer Resource Centre nearest you.

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