

Adult Day Services: A Model that Works

By Heather Turbyne-Pollard, CDP

Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate the need for adult day services.
2. Illustrate the benefits beyond those to the older adults served.
3. Demystify common misconceptions about adult day services.

Background

Adult Day Centers (ADCs) are an invaluable alternative to more traditional long-term care placement for older adults who can no longer safely remain at home during the day. They also provide needed respite and support to family caregivers and lessen health care expenses for consumers and the health care system. Most of the attendees of adult day centers are at risk of needing residential care and qualify for nursing home placement, yet live at home, typically with a family caregiver, many of whom work and/or are older adults themselves. Adult day makes living at home possible--something 90% of adults 65+ say they prefer to facility placement, according to AARP.

Adult Day Centers started opening their doors in the 1970's, largely in urban areas. Since then, programs have spread to smaller cities and towns across the U.S. Today, with 7,500 ADCs across the United States, adult day programs are available to more and more older adults and their caregivers. And that's encouraging, given the demographic shift that is occurring in the U.S. We are entering an unprecedented time where more older adults will need care and more of them will not have family caregivers to provide support.

Presently, Virginia has 69 licensed adult day centers. Many of them work collaboratively to ensure that ADC's are adhering to regulations as set forth by their licensing body, The Department of Social Services, and often share information on program services, resources and supports with one another. LeadingAge Virginia is part of LeadingAge and provides news to ADCs, including updates on federal legislation, funding opportunities, research reports about adult day programs and resources and information to assist providers. They also help advocate at the local and national levels for the adult day system around reimbursement rates and other policies that influence our work.

Benefits to Older Adults

Adult day programs offer older adults the opportunity to establish relationships and connections with other attendees and staff. Connections and relationships are essential ingredients to overcoming loneliness and feelings of isolation, which can intensify the impact of disease and disability. The physical environment and the program design of ADCs provide safety, structure, and often, a sense of purpose for attendees. The center staff build relationships and create a culture that supports, involves, and validates each attendee, creating the framework for all center services.

ADC's employ a full range of interdisciplinary professionals: nurses, CNAs, recreational therapists, social workers, and others, who provide attendees with health monitoring, medication management, activities to stimulate mind and body, socialization, and assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs).

Benefits to Family Caregivers

According to the National Alliance for Caregivers and AARP, there are an estimated 53 million Americans providing unpaid care to a family member or loved one. A substantial body of research shows that a majority of caregivers are unprepared for their role and generally have little to no support. If family caregivers were to suddenly stop providing help to older Americans in need, the long-term care system of the United States would effectively collapse.

For caregivers, adult day offers respite, support group opportunities, and access to long term aging networks and resources. In addition, ADCs can reduce out of pocket health care expenses, lessen use of high cost centers such as emergency departments and delay institutionalization.

Most family caregivers are middle-to-older age individuals (adult children or spouses) who are also managing their own health conditions. While there are many positive effects, family caregiving can be stressful. The stress that can sometimes come with managing caregiving duties often makes it difficult for caregivers to manage and/or tend to their own health.

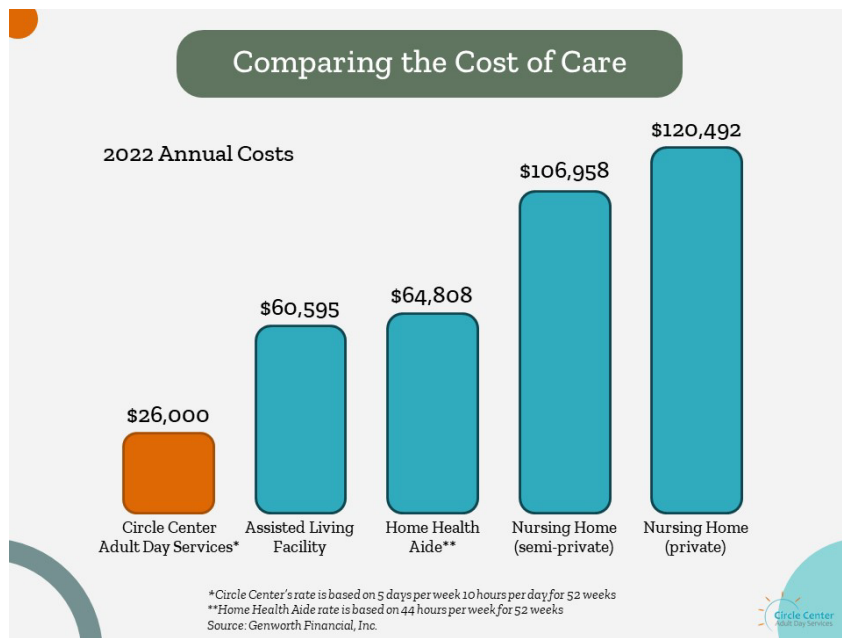
According to the World Health Organization, up to 75% of family caregivers will develop psychological illnesses and 15–32% experience depression, keeping caregivers out of the workforce and reducing workplace productivity for extended periods of time.

Adult Day Centers provide respite opportunities for family caregivers to perform activities, e.g., go to work, run errands, or fulfill other life roles and to take care of themselves.

Covering the Cost of Care

Adult day is a cost effective option within aging services. At roughly \$100- \$125 a day, adult day is a great economic alternative to more expensive services like in-home care or facility placement.

Adult day is generally paid for by private pay, Veterans Affairs (VA), or Medicaid. Some public and nonprofit centers also offer scholarships or sliding fee scales based on income. Some longer term care insurance policies also cover adult day.



New Opportunities

As the American population of those 65 and older reaches historic highs, the use of and demand for long-term care will increase, as well. That, coupled with older adults’ preference to stay at home and “age in place,” means that community-based services like adult day centers are poised for growth. With their emphasis on prevention, health promotion, and functional capacity, more ADCs is good news.

In combination with growth, ADCs must address public misconceptions about their offering. These are typically around the nature of program offerings (it’s just “babysitting”) and cost (it’s as expensive as other options). Programs go far beyond keeping attendees safe, with activities rooted in health science and customized to individual needs. And, the cost of ADCs is not only much less expensive than other long-term care options, few are turned away if cost is a barrier.

There isn’t one fix to the health care crisis among older adults that is brewing and gaining momentum. Adult Day Centers provide one model that is proven to work and is in-step with the mindsets of today’s older adults and the needs of their families.

Outcomes

Aside from deeply moving personal stories that ADC staff witness every day and hear from families they serve, other quantitative outcomes have also emerged from the field. Most ADCs have a primary goal to delay or prevent nursing home placement, allowing older adults to live at home longer. At Circle Center, for example, we served 114 older adults from July 2021 to June 2022, which prevented 23,166 days of nursing home placement. That equates to a net savings for families and taxpayers of \$2,021,492.84. And that’s data from just one ADC! Adult Day is a model that works.

Outcomes for family caregivers are also positive. In Circle Center's Annual Caregiver Survey for 2022-23, 99% of our caregivers reported that our program has reduced their stress as a caregiver. And 94% reported that the Center has allowed them to maintain other life roles (employee, spouse, parent).

When asked about the impact on their loved ones who attend Circle Center, 96% reported that the center has improved their loved one's quality of life and 85% said that it enabled their loved one to remain safely at home - to age in place.

Many other centers across the state and country could share similar encouraging data.

Case Studies

Mark and Deborah



Mark retired from the U.S. Department of Defense in 2013, poised to enjoy his newfound free time. He loved going to classes at the Lifelong Learning Center in Midlothian, VA, particularly the exercise-related classes. In and between Mark's new retirement activities, his wife Deborah began noticing behaviors of Mark's that were concerning, including circumlocution (the use of an unnecessarily large number of words to express an idea), occasional outbursts of rage, and the need to sleep with a flashlight.

In May 2020, Deborah insisted Mark be evaluated and he was diagnosed with posterior cortical atrophy, a rare form of Alzheimer's disease, as well as hydrocephalus dementia. As COVID was becoming a reality, Mark continued to enjoy Lifelong Learning Center classes online. Deborah, a professor at Longwood, began juggling more and more, like so many educators at that time. Thankfully, Mark, an Air Force veteran, got into the Veteran's Administration system in November 2021 and supports, including weekly in-home and respite care, began to help Deborah and Mark with the stressors of their new normal.

In October 2022, thanks to word-of-mouth from church friends, Deborah and Mark found Circle Center. Deborah will tell you that for both of them, it has been a game-changer. Mark is able to get the physical, speech, and occupational therapies he needs on-site, and he has blossomed as an artist, enjoying both structured and unstructured art time. He has also made friends. His home health nurse notes great improvement in Mark's communication, his gait, visual spatial perception, and mood. Deborah will profess that her stress level is much lower and she is able to focus on her work and other facets of her life as needed. She also benefits from the family caregiver support groups offered at Circle Center.

Deborah says it used to be "one thing after another," but now, thanks to Mark's time in adult day, Mark and Deborah are able to enjoy life and each other once again.

William and Donald

South Richmond Adult Day Care Center (SRADCC) is another adult day serving older adults in metro Richmond. They have two recent case studies that prove that engaging center participants

through activities and programs, while also partnering with their families and their health care practitioners to stay abreast of chronic disease and changes to their general health, lead to healthier aging.

William came to SRADCC in 2019 with a history of cerebral vascular accident (CVA) due to his out-of-control diabetes, sometimes having blood sugars in the 400's. The SRADCC medical staff went to work partnering with his practitioner. Through that collaboration, along with modifications to William's meals at home and at the center and diabetes education, William began to make healthier choices. His practitioner was ecstatic to let SRADCC medical staff know that William's A1C is in an acceptable range. In fact, William is no longer insulin dependent. He, his family, his doctor, and our staff are so proud of William.

Donald was referred to SRADCC through Richmond Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA). His struggles with mental health had led to him experiencing a housing crisis. RBHA administered his mental health medications, he stabilized, and went to live at home with his brother. Since his brother had to work and Donald needed supervision during the day, a common issue for families who rely on adult day, RBHA reached out to SRADCC. Rough around the edges when he initially arrived, Donald is now clean shaven, polite, and our resident intellect, holding the title of SRADCC Trivia King!

Study Questions

1. What policy changes could be implemented to promote the long-term care cost savings demonstrated by adult day programs?
2. What barriers (real or perceived) must adult day centers overcome as they seek to expand services to meet the needs of the growing older adult population over the next decade?
3. What systems and policies need to be in place to support caregivers (family and professional) as the older adult population grows?

References

[AARP](#)

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About the Author



Heather Turbyne-Pollard, CDP, is the CEO of [Circle Center Adult Day Services](#). The Center's mission is to provide comprehensive individualized quality care for older adults during the day, enabling them to live at home, and to provide resources and respite for family caregivers. The Center is a licensed, Medicaid certified nonprofit agency with a nearly 50 year history of providing adult day services to the greater Richmond community. Heather also serves as the Co-Chair of LeadingAge Virginia's Adult Day Council. She can be reached at hpollard@circlecenterva.org.