



# Rural Caregivers: Where Community Meets the Challenge

The Rosalynn Carter Institute's  
Evidence-Based Approach



**“Kindness is the connection that links us all together and strengthens the bonds within our communities, neighborhoods, and families.”**

**– Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter**



For rural caregivers, resilience isn't just a trait, it's a way of life. However, in rural America and rural communities all around the world, when someone needs care, informal community networks often become the first line of support. Since our roots were founded in the small town of Plains, located in Sumter County, Georgia, the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers (RCI) has understood these unique challenges.

# Why We Are:

## Experience with Courage and Visionary Leadership



The Rosalynn Carter Institute was founded with the mission to carry on Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter's visionary leadership to ensure family caregivers are seen, heard, and supported. For nearly 40 years, RCI has carried forward her values through research, data, and direct service. Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter understood the demands caregivers face because she lived them—helping her father through illness in their hometown of Plains, located in Sumter County, Georgia. That experience, paired with her deep empathy and systems-level thinking, helped shape a national conversation about caregiving and continues to guide RCI's vision today.

RCI has long prioritized supporting caregivers in rural communities, informed by its roots in Georgia and the realities caregivers face where access to services is limited and informal networks often fill the gap. From the beginning, RCI recognized that rural caregivers face unique and often invisible challenges—but also bring extraordinary resilience. That understanding continues to shape RCI's evidence-based approach.

Our commitment to inclusion means we gather and analyze data across diverse identities and locations, ensuring every caregiver's experience is honored. Through ongoing research and programming, we:



**See Caregivers**—bring visibility to rural caregivers' experiences, validating the critical role they play in family and community life.



**Hear Caregivers**—listen deeply and respectfully to stories that illuminate need, challenge, and resilience, and translate them into data and insight that guide responsive programs.



**Support Caregivers**—design tools, resources, and policies that meet caregivers where they are, improving outcomes through actionable, evidence-based interventions.

This approach helps ensure caregivers are not only supported but recognized as essential to the strength of our healthcare systems, communities, and families.

# Who We Are:

## Impacting Rural Caregivers



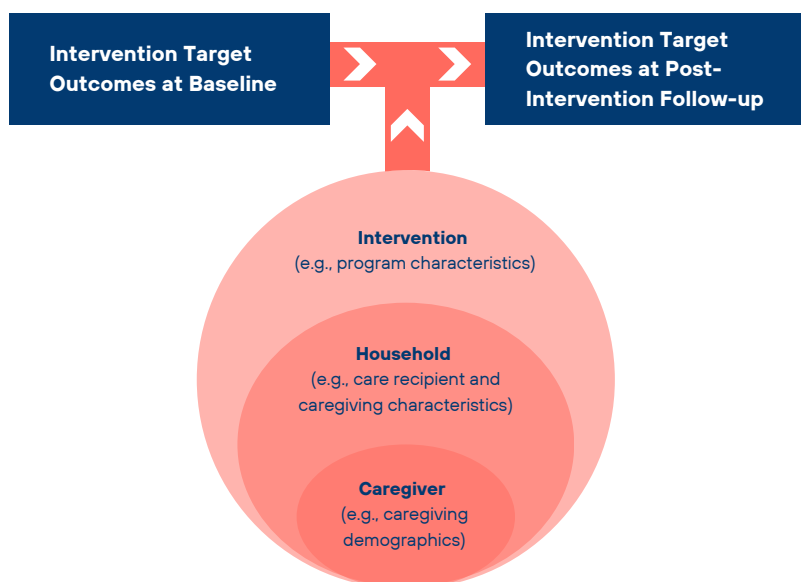
RCI's approach is rooted in the belief that rigorous data, research, and evaluation lead to stronger support for family caregivers, especially those in rural communities. Our mission is to ensure that programs don't just reach caregivers but improve their lives. We use outcome-driven insights to shape solutions that are scalable, culturally relevant, and grounded in real-world experience.

Over the past two decades, RCI has built a framework for identifying the key factors that affect caregiver outcomes. Our research, originally informed by the experiences of military and rural caregivers, analyzes patterns across 21 **individual, household, and program-level** variables to determine what works, for whom, and why. These findings help sharpen our interventions to better serve caregivers on the ground.

### This model helps us:

- Identify drivers of improvement across caregiver stress, satisfaction, and resource access
- Apply those drivers to design more effective, practical solutions
- Ensure that what we offer is inclusive, measurable, and adaptable to rural realities

**Figure 1. RCI Conceptual Model of Potential Drivers that Change Outcome**



As illustrated in our **RCI Conceptual Model of Potential Drivers**, we look holistically at the caregiver ecosystem—from demographics to household dynamics to program design. When we connect that data to research reviews and program learnings, we're able to turn evidence into action. This framework informs how we build and implement every intervention, ensuring that what we deliver not only addresses need but delivers measurable outcomes for rural caregivers.



# Who We Serve:

## Context Matters for Caregivers



Rural caregivers face distinct realities that shape how they provide care. Insights from evidence-based data support our understanding of these needs, and RCI's goal is to meet caregivers where they are. According to RCI Program Data (2024), 17.6% of caregivers served by RCI live in rural areas. This represents a higher concentration of rural caregivers than the national average, reinforcing the importance of tailored programs for these communities.

Compared to their urban counterparts, rural caregivers often face limited access to services and greater financial, logistical, and emotional challenges. Our approach is grounded in designing supports that are culturally responsive and accessible, whether delivered in person, through printed or digital materials, or via virtual services.

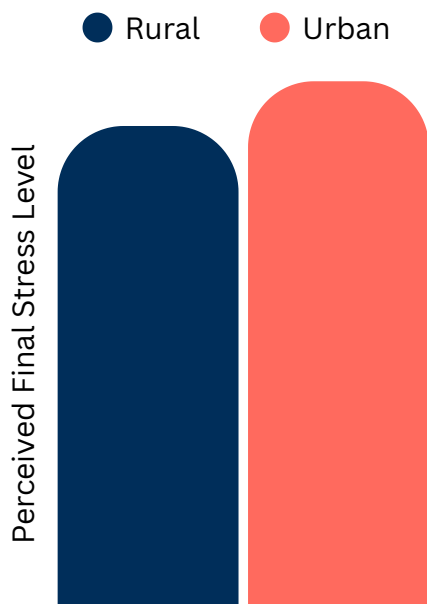
### **We have learned throughout our programs that rural caregivers often experience:**

- Higher financial stress than urban caregivers
- Lower satisfaction with the support available to them
- Lack of available openings in local nursing homes and assisted living facilities
- Fewer home health aides available to support families
- Declining access to rural hospitals, with many at risk of closure
- Long travel distances to see specialists for conditions such as dementia or cancer
- Limited broadband access, reducing opportunities for telehealth and online resources
- Transportation barriers, especially during emergencies and in areas with unpaved roads
- Complex caregiving needs among families with adults and children with exceptional needs

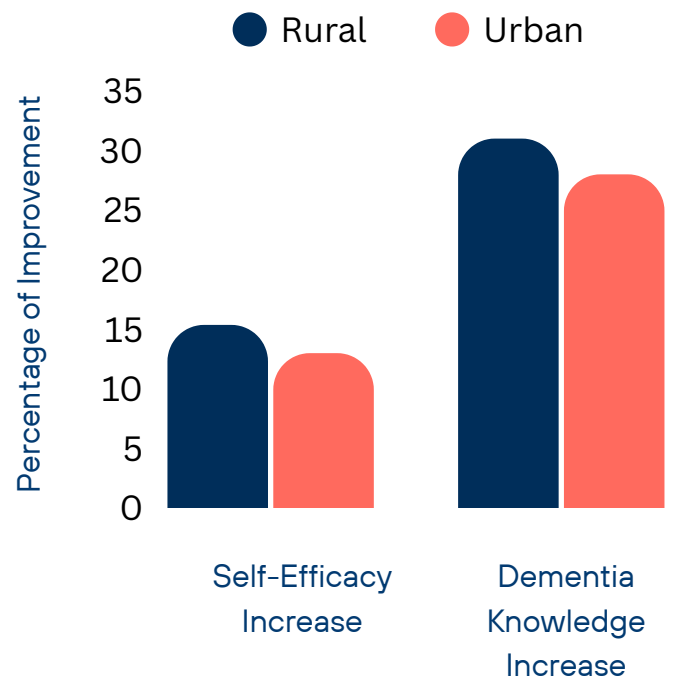
Despite these obstacles, rural communities demonstrate deep-rooted strength and care. First responders—including EMTs, 911 dispatchers, law enforcement, and fire departments—are often personally connected to families and step in quickly when needed. Faith communities, neighbors, and extended families play key roles, offering informal support networks that remain vital across generations.

# Rural Caregivers Served by the RCI

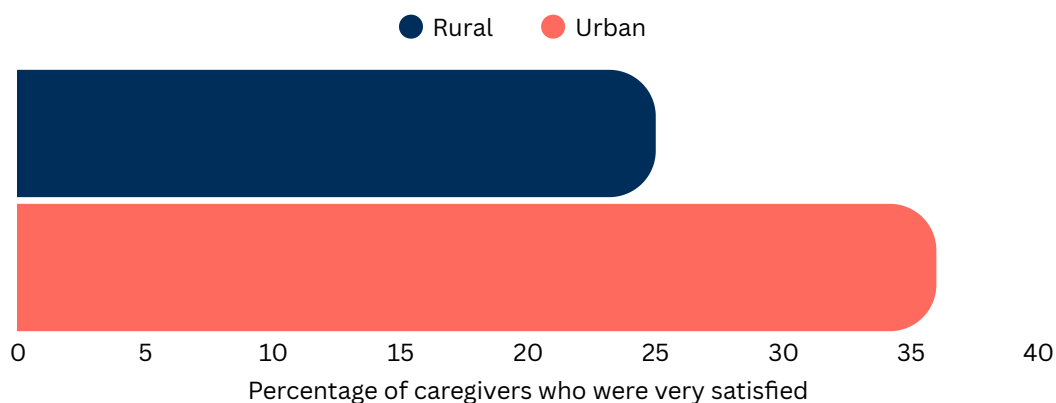
## Rural Caregivers Reported Higher Financial Stress Level



## Rural Caregivers Showed Greater Improvement



## Rural caregivers were less satisfied with the public help they received





# What we do:

## Programs Delivering Change and Impact



Our approach has always involved engagement, listening, shaping solutions, testing them, capturing results, and preparing for scale. To do this well—and responsibly—we center our values and move forward with the evidence and research required.

We recognize that caregiving in rural settings differs from urban experiences and have developed a rural-specific approach that delivers resources where and how they're needed, grounded in community culture and logistical realities.

Measurable results from RCI's work demonstrate how our programs are helping us see, hear and support rural family caregivers:

- **Rural Dementia Caregivers:** Rural participants in RCI's dementia programs report significantly higher gains of knowledge and self-efficacy compared to their urban counterparts (DWD program data, 2020-2024).
- **Emergency Preparedness:** In our rural First Responders' Emergency Readiness initiative, participant scores improved by 43%. (RCI Emergency Prep Webinar data, 2024)
- **Depressive Symptoms:** 36% reduction in the rural caregiver depressive symptoms (RCI Data).
- **Subjective Burden:** 27% reduction in the rural caregiver subjective burden (RCI Data).

These improvements are possible because of RCI's commitment to delivering support in formats that meet caregivers where they are, including in-person, virtual, printed, and digital materials.



# How we work:

## Cross Sector Partnerships, Rooted in Local Community



Partnerships are a cornerstone of RCI's rural strategy. We collaborate across sectors to amplify our impact and build trust within local communities. RCI's rural-specific approach includes:

- **Community-Based Partnerships:** Working with trusted institutions—like churches, schools, and extension offices—to deliver services where caregivers already gather.
- **Distance-Accessible Design:** Offering multi-modal program delivery (virtual, in-person, and print) that accommodates transportation limitations and broadband constraints.
- **Rural-Informed Program Development:** Creating resources that reflect the realities of caregiving in rural communities, including limited access to specialists and emergency services.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Elevating rural caregivers' voices in national caregiving policy to address systemic challenges like hospital closures, financial strain, and the erosion of local health infrastructure.

## What's Next: Why It Matters

To truly support rural family caregivers, we must go beyond offering help—we must understand who they are, where they live, and how places shape their experience. This means paying close attention to how culture, geography, infrastructure, and identity intersect in caregiving.

RCI's data confirms that while caregiving challenges vary across rural communities, our programs yield consistent improvements across race, ethnicity, gender, and background. This reinforces a core belief:

**When programs are grounded in research and informed by cultural context, they work.**

That's why we're committed to listening more, learning more, and responding more, using data to drive insight, and insight to shape respectful, resilient, and community-rooted caregiving support.



# Learn more

## For Healthcare Providers:

Extend your reach into rural communities

## For Rural Caregivers:

Connect with resources designed with your specific needs

## For Policymakers:

Learn how targeted rural caregiver support strengthens entire communities

## For Donors:

Bring evidence-based programs to caretakers

[rosalynncarter.org](https://rosalynncarter.org)



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