

News Release

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TTUHSC Receives DSHS Pilot Grant to Provide Alzheimer's Disease Education for Health Care Professionals in Rural Areas

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Texas's population surpassed 31 million — a 7.3% growth since 2020. This creates significant health care challenges for Texans, particularly rural populations that tend to be elderly with nearly 20% of residents older than 65. These factors, combined with geographic isolation and limited access to specialists, underscore the need for innovative solutions to improve health care access to seniors in rural communities.

To help meet this need, the Texas Department of State and Health Services (DSHS) awarded the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) \$125,000 in federal funding through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Building Our Largest Infrastructure for Dementia grant for the Alzheimer's and Dementia Care Project ECHO. Beginning October 2025, this initiative will provide Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) education for health care professionals in rural areas through Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes). The program will support clinicians with continuing education, telementoring and collaboration opportunities to increase quality care and support for persons living with dementia and their caregivers.

Project ECHO, a program under the [TexLa Telehealth Resource Center](#), is an innovative telementoring platform that uses videoconferencing to connect health care providers with expert teams to share knowledge, expand capacity and improve patient outcomes using videoconference technology. Ariel P. Santos, M.D., TTUHSC Department of Surgery chair and director of the School of Medicine telemedicine program, said Project ECHO will be used to deliver critical information and support to aging populations and individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other related dementias.

Santos, who also serves as the principal investigator of the TexLa Telehealth Resource Center, which expands telehealth capacity and usage in Texas and Louisiana to improve health care access, quality and outcomes, said director Kelly Alvarez will collaborate with the TTUHSC Garrison Institute on Aging to expand access to care and resources for seniors in rural communities.

“According to the Alzheimer’s Association, West and South Texas have the highest prevalence of the disease and related dementias, reaching up to 18.4% in areas like Presidio in Presidio County,” Santos said. “Though Texas has a significant number of neurologists and specialists, there is about a 19% gap of specialists in areas like West Texas. To improve access, projects like this will bring the specialists to our primary care providers through virtual connections.”

The Garrison Institute on Aging has established outreach collaborations with primary care physicians, neurologists and other clinical providers in rural Texas. Jonathan Singer, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist, Memory Clinic director at the Garrison Institute on Aging and assistant professor in the TTUHSC Department of Pharmacology and Neuroscience, said by building on this foundation, the institute will expand its connections and outreach to engage clinicians across both rural and urban Texas in the ECHO program.

“Project ECHO bridges the gap between rural and urban health care by connecting clinicians to expert knowledge and resources,” Singer said. “This program reduces disparities in dementia care, empowering providers in every community to identify symptoms and deliver exceptional, evidence-based treatment regardless of their ZIP code.”

Singer, also an assistant professor in the Texas Tech University Department of Psychological Sciences, added the Garrison Institute on Aging will convene a multidisciplinary team of dementia specialists to serve as hub experts, further strengthening and enhancing the Project ECHO initiative.

The Alzheimer’s and Dementia Care Project ECHO will:

- Increase the number of continuing education opportunities in Texas for health care providers on ADRD-related topics to increase quality care for patients and their caregivers.
- Increase opportunities for collaboration and consultation among primary care providers and related multidisciplinary specialists, focusing on access in rural and underserved areas.
- Increase awareness and understanding of ADRD-related topics among health care providers as evidenced by post-participation evaluations.
- Increase clinicians’ confidence to diagnose and manage ADRD across the disease span as compared before program participation.
- Increase knowledge of dementia care best practices and mentoring opportunities for health care providers through rapid dissemination.
- Increase availability of data to assess effectiveness and sustainability of education activities.

This project is funded through Sept. 30, 2026 and is administered by the DSHS Alzheimer’s Disease Program, which uses a public health approach to address ADRD statewide.