

ADRC Director Beth Fauth Selected for NIH Scholar Program to Support Dementia Caregivers

04/01/2026



Beth Fauth, director of the Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Research Center at USU, has been selected as a scholar of the NIA IMPACT Collaboratory.

For more than 110,000 Utahns who provide informal care for a loved one with dementia, the ongoing stress and uncertainty can often be overwhelming. Beth Fauth, Ph.D., professor and director of the state-funded Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Research Center within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) at USU, is working to ensure these caregivers will one day receive the emotional support they need.

Fauth has been selected as a scholar in the NIA IMPACT Collaboratory, an initiative of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Institute on Aging. The Collaboratory is designed to help researchers move effective dementia care interventions into real-world health care systems where the public can readily access them.

"Dr. Fauth's selection as an NIA IMPACT Scholar is a remarkable honor that highlights the national impact of her scholarship and her dedication to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD)," said Shawn Whiteman, executive associate dean in CEHS. "Her work has addressed the challenges of ADRD caregiving well before the topic gained national prominence, helping to shape the field in meaningful ways. We are thrilled that her leadership and expertise will now extend to this national Collaboratory, amplifying the reach, visibility, and real-world impact of the innovative research and practice

emerging from the Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia Research Center and the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services."

Fauth's current research focus is on ACT for Caregivers, an online, self-guided intervention based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) that has been designed for people caring for individuals with dementia. ACT is a form of psychotherapy that uses acceptance, mindfulness, and values-based strategies to promote mental health and wellbeing.

Traditionally, caregiver interventions have focused on teaching skills and awareness: how to respond when a loved one wanders, how to manage behavioral symptoms, or understanding how dementia progresses over time. Those programs are valuable, Fauth said, but they address only part of the caregiving experience.

"Dementia care is really difficult," she explained. "Caregivers can experience chronic stress, grief and loss, and really big emotions. Caregivers can't just walk away from the role. Even if their loved one moves into assisted living, they're still deeply involved."

ACT for Caregivers directly addresses the emotional burden on caregivers. Rather than trying to eliminate stress—which is often impossible—the intervention teaches caregivers how to live alongside it. Participants learn skills to notice and accept difficult thoughts and emotions, clarify their personal values, and take meaningful action even in the presence of ongoing hardship.

"It's not about making the stress go away, because for someone providing love and care to someone with dementia, it is a difficult role to be in, even with support and resources," Fauth explained. "Our program is designed to teach skills to help caregivers live with their stressful situation more comfortably."

The six-session online program was developed in collaboration with USU psychologists Michael Twohog, a world-renowned expert in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Michael Levin, who helped repackage the traditional therapist-delivered ACT into a self-guided digital format. Ty Aller, in Human Development and Family Studies, and PhD graduate student Jacob Gossner also played key roles in adapting the program over time.

Participants work through interactive exercises, identifying emotions they find difficult and practicing new ways of responding to them. The program also includes dementia-specific content, including guidance on "ambiguous loss"—

a form of grief common in dementia caregiving when a loved one is physically present but psychologically changed.

Importantly, the program is very flexible. Caregivers can focus on the issues that are most pressing to them, such as financial strain, sibling conflict, guilt, or self-criticism. On average, sessions take 20 to 30 minutes and can be completed at home at a participant's own pace.

The accessibility of the intervention is critical, explained Fauth. "Caregivers often can't leave their houses easily or leave their loved one alone," she said. "If they're older, driving can be difficult. Traditional therapy can also be expensive, and the wait lists can be long. And while talking to a therapist is highly encouraged, this online intervention helps with some of the practical barriers to accessing emotional support."

Fauth's team has already completed multiple stages of research on ACT for Caregivers. First, they adapted the ACT therapy specifically for dementia caregivers. Next came a rigorous randomized controlled trial demonstrating that caregivers who participated in the program experienced fewer depressive symptoms and improved quality of life compared to those who did not receive the intervention. Fauth and her team are now examining *how* the intervention works, identifying the mechanisms of change that lead to improved outcomes. They are also working to provide ACT for Caregivers to military families and veterans.

Fauth says the final step—getting the program into the hands of the public—is the most difficult. "My training is as a scientist," she said. "I can help build an intervention. I can fine-tune it to make sure it's appropriate and helpful for caregivers. I can run rigorous studies and analyze the data to see if and how the program works. But I don't currently have the skill set to get the program to the public in a widespread way once it's validated."

That's where the NIA IMPACT Collaboratory comes in. The scholar program provides year-long training in which Fauth will receive mentorship from national experts who have successfully integrated research interventions into health systems for people living with dementia. She will learn how to identify clinical partners, understand how health systems evaluate new programs, and design studies to determine how this program fits within existing health care structures.

Through the Collaboratory, Fauth will also network with other scholars and experts in dementia across disciplines—from speech pathology, geriatric medicine, nursing,

and more. Those connections may help her identify future health system partners and apply for additional NIA funding focused specifically on dissemination.

"Getting research-driven programs into health systems for widespread use is tough for scientists without this kind of support, network, and training," said Fauth. "Even if a researcher puts an intervention on a website and says it's available, the public doesn't necessarily know to go find it or even that it exists. The most successful way these interventions reach people is when they're embedded within health systems that they are already using."

ACT for Caregivers has become much more than an academic project for Fauth. It is the work she feels most passionate about, and she is eager for the public to experience the same benefits she's seen in her research participants.

"Across our prior studies, the data has consistently shown this to be effective in helping caregivers with their distress and improving their well-being. Our interviews with caregivers are really what drives us to move forward with our excitement. They say this program is different than what they've tried before, and they provide examples of how it has really helped them navigate difficult experiences," Fauth said.

Note: Fauth has two funded projects that will be testing updated versions of the ACT for Caregivers program, with recruitment of caregiver research participants starting in summer or fall of 2026 and extending over a few years. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about accessing this program via joining a research study, email ADRC@usu.edu. You will be contacted by a member of the research team when the studies are approved to recruit participants.