Older Adult Mental Health Fact Sheet

A guide to working with older adults in care

The older adult population is the fastest growing population segment

By 2030 adults 65 and up will be approximately 20% of the total population, and about 25% of older adults will experience a mental health challenge. Mental health challenges are not a normal part of aging.[i]

In the United States older adults die by suicide at a higher rate than the national average

Older adults account for only 13.75% of the population but accounted for 16.37% of all suicides in 2012. [ii]

The effects of mental illness in older adults affects more than just mood

Poor mental health can delay or prevent recovery from illness or surgery. It can contribute to cognitive decline or a decrease in physical health.[iii] Getting help for those dealing with mental illness can save lives and improve quality of life.

Stigma about mental health prevents many older adults from seeking treatment

Older adults are more likely to get help for their mental health if they are screened for it by their primary care provider.[iv] Regular screenings for older adults can save lives.

Depression is not a normal part of aging

Many health professionals and supports for older adults believe depression is a normal part of aging. This belief is often shared by many older adults themselves. This mistaken belief results in the under diagnosis and treatment of depression in older adults.[v]

Older adults are more likely to report depression as physical symptoms rather than psychological

Symptoms are not always reported as "traditional symptoms." Older adults are more likely to report headaches, weakness, and palpitations.

Older adults require a different treatment response from their mental health provider than their younger counterparts.

Key treatment considerations may include:

- Transportation.

- Outreach with services provided in their home, including assisted living facility or nursing home.

- Case-finding efforts to identify and refer isolated adults. The Gatekeepers model trains postal workers, utility workers, bank tellers and other professionals who have regular contact with older adults to identify and refer older adults suffering from psychiatric disabilities.

- Evidenced-based practices. For example, Improving Mood — Promoting Access to Collaborative Treatment (IMPACT) places geriatric mental health specialists in primary care practices, and the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives for Seniors (PEARLS) provides in-home treatment and follow-up for individuals with mild depression.

For more information

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Resources

- National Institute on Aging
  www.nia.nih.gov/

- Mental health myths
  https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/mental-health-myths-facts

- Administration for Community Living
  www.aoa.gov/

- National Council on Aging, Behavioral Health
  https://www.ncoa.org/center-for-healthy-aging/behavioral-health/

- Improving mood — promoting access to collaborative treatment.
  aims.uw.edu/impact-improving-mood-promoting-access-collaborative-treatment

- American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
  https://www.aagponline.org/

- Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives (PEARLS)
  https://depts.washington.edu/hprc/evidence-based-programs/pearls-program/

- The state of mental health and aging in America,
  https://www.cdc.gov/aging/agingdata/data-portal/mental-health.html

- Promoting emotional health and preventing suicide: A toolkit for senior centers
  https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Promoting-Emotional-Health-and-Preventing-Suicide/SMA15-4416

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[i] https://www.samhsa.gov/specific-populations/age-gender-based

[ii] https://www.suicidology.org/Portals/14/docs/Resources/FactSheets/Elderly2012.pdf

[iii] https://www.samhsa.gov/specific-populations/age-gender-based

[iv] https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma15-4416.pdf

[v] https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/depression-and-older-adults