

Older Adults and Mental Health: The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*

Overview

As we age as a Nation, so too does the number of older adults of all races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status who are affected by mental disorders. Some will experience late onset of these illnesses; others will have experienced them throughout their lifetimes. The most prevalent mental disorder among older adults is anxiety disorders, which affect an estimated 11.4% of the older adult population. An estimated 2 million older Americans experience depressive illness. Older adults also are disproportionately likely to die by suicide; while representing 13% of the population, they account for 18% of all suicide deaths. Several studies have also found that many older adults who die by suicide have visited a primary care physician within a month of their suicide – suggesting the importance of specialized education for the physicians and other general health providers who meet the health care needs of older adults.

The prevalence of co-occurring mental and substance use disorders is also a growing concern in the older adult population. In lieu of seeking mental health services, as with other populations, some older adults "self-medicate" anxiety or depression with alcohol. In most cases, the mental disorder is only diagnosed after the alcohol problem is identified. Further, older adults may misuse prescription medications, often inadvertently. The result could masquerade as a mental disorder. With older adults consuming at least 50% of over-the-counter medications and the average older adult taking 4.5 prescription medications concurrently and an additional two over-the-counter medications, the need for further education for older adults and their service providers is clear.

SAMHSA Programs and Services Specific to Older Adults

Rebalancing Long Term Care: State Policy Academy to Address the Health and Social Service Needs of Older Adults. SAMHSA, the Administration on Aging (AoA), and the National Governor's Association will conduct an older adult policy academy, tentatively scheduled for August 2004. Six to eight competitively selected States will participate in intensive activities that will enable the States develop and/or enhance their aging adult service infrastructures to increase capacity to meet the health and social needs of older adults, including those with substance use and mental health disorders. Additionally, this initiative will result in a comprehensive and coordinated systems approach to meeting the home- and community-based health and social service needs of older adults.

* The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the Federal agency charged with improving the quality and availability of prevention and treatment services for people with or at risk from mental and substance use disorders. The Agency is guided by a vision of a life in the community for everyone and a mission focused on building resilience and facilitating recovery. To bring SAMHSA's vision and mission from paper to practice, SAMHSA's budget, policy and programs have been aligned to reflect a series of core priority areas, among them, a focus on older adults. Through our Aging Matrix Area, SAMHSA has been broadening and enhanced its attention to the specific needs of older adults, including prevention of, diagnosis and treatment for, and recovery from mental and substance use disorders through peer, family, and community-based support services.

Get Connected! Toolkit (Linking Older Adults With Medication, Alcohol, and Mental Health Resources). This toolkit, developed in partnership with the National Council on Aging (NCOA) and supported by AoA, provides health and social services providers in the aging services field with health promotion and health education activities to prevent substance abuse and mental health problems in older adults. The toolkit also provides strategies to link providers with substance abuse and mental health experts/organizations in their area. The Kit includes a program coordinators guide, fact sheets, self-screening tools, resource list, a video on how to talk with older adults about alcohol and medication problems, brochures for older adults on mental and substance use disorders, and the promising practices publication *Promoting Older Adult Health: Aging Network Partnerships to Address Medication, Alcohol, and Mental Health Problems and Substance Abuse Among Older Adults: A Guide for Social Services Providers*.

Older Adult Center for Excellence. SAMHSA is working to launch its Older Adult Center for Excellence that will identify best practices, expand on evidence-based prevention activities, and serve as a key component of SAMHSA's Science to Service Agenda. The Center will also identify and analyze gaps and trends in the field, evaluate current services programs for inclusion in the National Registry of Effective Programs, design targeted curricula, and develop public education materials for this population. This Center further will develop materials for and provide training and technical assistance to increase the knowledge of States, communities, health/social service providers, older adults, and caregivers to prevent and treat substance abuse and mental health problems in this population.

Primary Care Research in Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services for the Elderly (PRISM-E). PRISM-E, a joint project among SAMHSA, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Health Resources and Service Administration and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, is comparing the effectiveness of service delivery models that treat older adults with mental and substance use disorders in primary care compared with the provision of enhanced specialty mental health and/or substance abuse settings. This is the largest study of depression in older adults, the largest study of alcohol use in the elderly and the first study of integration versus referral service models in older adults. The study hopes to identify outcome differences between referring consumers to enhanced specialty mental health and/or substance abuse services outside the primary care setting and those providing such services within the primary care setting itself.

Positive Aging Resource Center (PARC). The PARC is designed to improve the mental health of older adults by providing assistance in the implementation and evaluation of innovative and evidence-based practices to increase the quality of mental health services and to expand access for all older adults including underserved, rural and ethnically diverse persons and their families.

New State Initiatives and Partnerships in Aging and Substance Abuse. SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) is developing a national strategy to help prevent alcohol and drug use problems among older adults by identifying risk and protective factors, and working with States to build partnerships, policy, and programs. CSAP is currently working with six States, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, New York, Oregon, and Pennsylvania, to shape policy and program directions that strengthen State capacity to reduce risk factors and increase protective factors.

Older Adult Stigma Roundtables. SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services, in collaboration with the National Mental Health Awareness Campaign and the American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, convened two roundtables (November 2003 and January 2004) to examine stigma and discrimination issues affecting older adults with mental illnesses. Each meeting brought together approximately 20 participants, a consortium of mental health care experts, consumers, and advocates. A series of recommendations and strategies, expected to be released later this year, is being developed to address these issues.

Implementing Evidence-Based Mental Health Services for Older Adults: Targeted Capacity Expansion (TCE) Grant Program: Nine grants were awarded in FY2002 to help communities meet the diverse mental health needs of older persons. Beyond expanding existing services, grantees also may develop and implement new mental health prevention, early intervention, and/or treatment services targeted to persons 65 years and older, initiate programs to improve the quality and accessibility of mental health services to older persons, and enhance the service infrastructure to support the increased amount, quality, and accessibility of services to older persons.

Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP). The SAMHSA TIP series provides substance abuse treatment professionals with best practices in treatment. SAMHSA draws on the experience and knowledge of clinical, research and administrative experts to produce each TIP. *Copies of the TIPs, including TIP 26: Substance Abuse Among Older Adults, is available through the SAMHSA website at www.samhsa.gov.*

For more information

Publications. SAMHSA has a number of publications specific to mental and substance use disorders in older adults. Three of the most recent are:

- Good Mental Health is Ageless,
- Aging, Medicines and Alcohol, and
- Get Connected! Toolkit (Linking Older Adults With Medication, Alcohol, and Mental Health Resources).

The materials are available through both SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center (1-800-789-2647) and its National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (1-800-729-6686.) As new material is developed by SAMHSA, it will be available through these resources and on the SAMHSA website (www.samhsa.gov).

Treatment Referral Services. SAMHSA's online locator systems provide private, convenient ways to find treatment programs for both mental health and substance use disorders. Information on nearly 15,000 substance abuse treatment facilities recognized by States as appropriate sources of care can be found through this database at www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov or through SAMHSA's National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Referral Hotline at 1-800-662-HELP. Nearby mental health services programs can be found on the SAMHSA website www.samhsa.gov by clicking on find mental health treatment on the homepage.

