

Older Adult Behavioral Health: The Facts

Emotional Health

- Depression is not a normal part of aging, yet it is one of the most common emotional health conditions among older adults.
- Among those ages 50 or older, 7.7% reported current depression and 15.7% reported experiencing depression at some point in their lifetime.ⁱ
- Older adults with depression visit the doctor and emergency room more often, use more medication, and stay longer in the hospital than those without depression.ⁱⁱ

Substance Abuse and Misuse

- Abuse and misuse of prescription drugs, use of illicit drugs, and excessive alcohol use are growing issues among older persons.
- More than one in five older adults has ever had a substance abuse disorder and one in twenty had a disorder in the past 12 months.ⁱⁱⁱ
- For the first time, the proportion of older adults going for substance abuse treatment is increasing relative to younger adults.^{iv}
- Although Americans age 65 and older comprise only 13% of the population, they account for approximately one-third of all medications prescribed in the United States.
- Older patients are more likely to be prescribed long-term and multiple prescriptions, which could lead to unintentional misuse or abuse. Higher rates of co-morbid illnesses, changes in metabolism with age, and potential drug interactions may increase the severity of health consequences as a result of misuse or abuse.^v
- Excessive alcohol use and illicit drug use among older adults is projected to grow as the baby boomers age. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 3.8% of those who are binge drinkers are age 65 and older, while 12.1% are ages 45-64.^{vi}
- Alcohol use may impact older adults differently as they age due to the way alcohol is metabolized. Excessive and/or long-term alcohol use can impact one's well-being by worsening other health conditions, increasing forgetfulness, increasing risk of falls, and causing other problems.
- The number of older adults using illicit drugs is on the rise. Individuals aged 50 to 59 reporting use of illicit drugs within the past year doubled from 5.1% in 2002 to 9.4% in 2007.^{vii} Illicit drug use is associated with numerous health and social problems; physiological, psychological, and social changes make older adults more vulnerable to the detrimental effects of use.

Suicide

- Suicide is a tragedy that disproportionately impacts older adults. Although adults over the age of 65 compose 12.4% of the U.S. population, they account for 14% of all suicides.
- For many years, older white men had the highest suicide rates of any age group^{viii}.
- Depression is one of the leading risk factors for suicide; other risks include social isolation, lack of a sense of purpose in life, illness and pain, and family losses.

ⁱ American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry (2008). Geriatrics and mental health—The Facts.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2008). The State of Mental Health and Aging in America, Issue Brief #1

ⁱⁱⁱ Lin, J.C. et al. (March 2011). Alcohol, tobacco, and nonmedical drug use disorders in U.S. adults 65 and older: data from the 2001-2002 National Epidemiological Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions, American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, 19(3):292-9.

^{iv} Arndt, Stephan Ph.D.; Clayton, Rebecca B.S.; Schultz, Susan K. M.D.. (August 2011). Trends in Substance Abuse Treatment 1998–2008: Increasing Older Adult First-Time Admissions for Illicit Drugs, American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry, Volume 19, Issue 8, p. 704–711

^v U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2011). Drug Abuse Research Reports.

^{vi} U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (January 2011). Binge Drinking --- United States, 2009, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 60(01); 101-104.

^{vii} Hen, Gfroerer, & Colliver. (August 2009). An Examination of Trends in Illicit Drug Use among Adults Aged 50 to 59 in the United States, OAS Data Review.

^{viii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (2007 Data).