



OLDER AMERICANS

Substance Abuse & Mental Health
Technical Assistance Center

Co-Occurring Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in Older Adults

DID YOU KNOW?

Co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders are associated with:

- Increased risk of poor health outcomes;
- More inpatient and outpatient service use; and
- Increased suicidal thoughts and attempts, compared to having only mental illness or substance abuse issues.

Depression and alcohol use are the most commonly cited co-occurring disorders in older adults.

The number of older adults with both substance abuse and mental illnesses varies by population and ranges from 7% to 38% of those with psychiatric illness and from 21% to 66% of those with substance abuse disorders.

What Does the Research Show?

- Successful early intervention strategies include programs that combine medication with:
 - Psychotherapy for depression
 - Integrated service delivery approaches
- Studies suggest that older adults with both depression and substance abuse benefit from treatment of depression, especially when use of alcohol is decreased.

Co-occurring substance abuse and mental health problems in older adults are serious public health problems that respond to treatment and care. The following information is adapted from the SAMHSA Older Americans Technical Assistance Center's "Evidence-Based Practices for Preventing Substance Abuse and Mental Health Problems in Older Adults" and the *Get Connected!* Toolkit curriculum developed by SAMHSA and the National Council on Aging.

What Can You Do?

Age in a Healthy Way:

- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise
- Participate in social activities with family, friends and within the community

Recognize the signs and symptoms of both mental health and substance abuse issues:

- Look for clues such as nervousness or loss of appetite and other symptoms of substance abuse and mental health issues. If any of the signs or symptoms mentioned below are present, consult a physician or behavioral health professional.

Symptoms of depression include:

- An "empty" feeling, ongoing sadness and anxiety
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Problems with eating and weight (loss or gain)
- Sleep problems

Symptoms of alcohol problems include:

- Making excuses, hiding or denying drinking
- Memory problems, confusion or disorientation
- Frequent falls, unexplained bruising
- Neglect of home, bills, personal hygiene

Promoting acceptance of mental health issues is important in removing the stigma associated with these problems. It is important for older adults to understand that:

- You are not alone. Depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems are more common than you think.
- These feelings are not your fault. Mental health problems are real health concerns.
- You may feel better if you seek treatment. Treatment does work.
- The earlier you see a doctor or other health professional and get help, the better you will feel.

www.samhsa.gov/OlderAdultsTAC/



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention

For more information: **E-mail:** OlderAmericansTAC@westat.com
Phone: 1-888-281-8010

A Few Resources:

SAMHSA Mental Health Facilities Locator:

Phone: 1-800-789-2647

Website:

<http://www.mental-health.samhsa.gov/hotlines/state.asp>

This search allows users to find mental health facilities and support services by city, state or zip code.

SAMHSA Substance Abuse Treatment Locator:

Call the 24-hour hotline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Website:

<http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/>

This search allows users to find drug abuse and alcoholism treatment facilities and support services by city, state or zip code.

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

Phone: 1-800-729-6686

Website:

<http://www.health.org>

National Mental Health Information Center (NMHIC)

Phone: 1-800-789-2647

Website:

<http://www.mental-health.samhsa.gov/>