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The Older Adult Behavioral Health Initiative¹

Senior behavioral health investment

The older adult behavioral health initiative strengthens services for older adults and people with disabilities in communities across Oregon. It does this by increasing collaboration and coordination among the agencies that serve this population, and by making sure that the people who care for them are well trained.

Why Focus on Aging?

Every day 10,000 Americans turn 65 years old. This trend will continue until 2029.

Today 15.4 percent of Oregonians are 65 years or older. By 2030, that figure will increase to 20 percent. The 75-and-older age group will be growing even faster.

Nationally, this trend has implications for health, including behavioral health:

- 15-20 percent of older adults have depression, which if untreated leads to other health problems;
- Men aged 75 and older have the highest suicide rate;
- Up to 15 percent of older adults are at-risk drinkers; and
- Up to 23 percent deal with prescription drug misuse.

Investment in effective strategies, including effective collaboration, care coordination, and a force of well-trained workers, will help ensure the health, safety and independence of older adults.

What is senior behavioral health investment?

Oregon is investing in senior behavioral health to better meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities by improving access to care and by making sure that providers work together to provide coordinated, high-quality physical and behavioral health care. The goal is improved quality of life for older adults. And over time, through sharing and adoption of best practices, the cost of care will actually be reduced.

This investment places 25 professionals who specialize in behavioral health for older adults in local and regional community mental health programs. Their purpose is to build capacity in each community's behavioral health system to provide the type of services older adults need.

¹ Adapted from public relations material supplied by Nirmala Dhar, Older Adult Behavioral Health Coordinator, Health Systems Division, Oregon Health Authority

Older Adult Behavioral Health Specialists' Functions

The Older Adult Behavioral Health Specialists (OABHS) have three primary functions:

- 1) Interagency/multi-system planning for better coordination among behavioral health, aging services, primary care providers and hospitals. For example:
 - Promote partnerships and linkages
 - Identify systems that need improvement; remove barriers to care
- 2) Facilitate complex case consultations
 - Promote a multi-disciplinary team and multi-morbidity approach
 - Make sure older adults and people with disabilities receive the appropriate help at the right time and at the right level of care
- 3) Workforce development and Community Education and Awareness
 - Increase direct service staff knowledge of normal aging processes; services provided by aging services, behavioral health, and primary care
 - Increase direct service staff knowledge of how behavioral health conditions/disorders present in an older population and best practices for addressing them
 - Promote local education and awareness activities that focus on risk and protective factors for older adults and people with disabilities

Portland State University's Institute on Aging, under contract with OHA, has produced eight training modules that the OABHS can use for workforce development statewide. These modules cover a diverse range of topics and provide one hour of CEU through the National Association of Social Workers:

- “The Everyday Experience of Aging”
- “Behavioral Health Partners”
- “Aging Services Partners”
- “Anxiety in Older Adults”
- “Parkinson's, Dementia, Depression & Grief”
- “Depression, Substance Abuse & Suicide”
- “Schizophrenia & Co-occurring Disorders”
- “Behavioral Health Issues & Advanced Care Planning”

We are also able to provide Mental Health First Aid trainings, an evidenced based program that assists the general public in identifying and responding to early-stage mental illnesses and mental health crisis.

If you are interested in having a training brought on site or to request complex case consultations please contact:

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