

## V. Older Adult Services

### Background

Over two million people over age 60 live in Pennsylvania, and studies indicate that 10% — 30% of the elderly population has a mental health disorder. However, the elderly are less likely to seek treatment from mental health professionals due to stigma. Older adults with behavioral health disorders who do not receive treatment are at increased risk of hospitalization, reduced physical functioning, and mortality.

Of Americans 65 and older, “twenty percent (6.6 million) are estimated to experience problems serious enough to put them at risk of psychiatric hospitalization or premature nursing home placement.”

[Behavioral Health and Aging Resource Manual](#)

### Snapshot – Older Adults

- Approximately 2.5 million persons over age 60 reside in Pennsylvania, giving the state the third highest percentage of older adults in the U.S.
- Over 26,000 older adults received behavioral health services in 2009
- Of the older adults who received services in 2009, over 3,500 were over age 80
- 80 Certified Peer Specialists have been trained to serve older adults

Older adults with mental illness have traditionally been underserved for a variety of reasons—lack of mobility and access to services, stigma, and services that are designed for younger populations. Recognizing the unique needs of older adults, OMHSAS established an Older Adult Subcommittee of its Advisory Committee in 2004. In 2005, the OMHSAS Statewide Advisory Committee established two over-arching older adult goals for system transformation:

- Implement services and policies to support recovery and resiliency in the adult behavioral health system
- Assure that behavioral health services and supports recognize and accommodate the unique needs of older adults

In response to these concerns, OMHSAS developed Bulletins 06-01 and 06-02 to emphasize the importance of ensuring adequate service provision for older adults. Additionally, in February 2006 OMHSAS and the Department of Aging developed state-wide Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between county mental health offices and Area Agencies on Aging that detailed how

the two agencies would partner to further support older adults with behavioral health needs. Specifically, the MOUs continue to create a platform for a clear understanding of each agency's commitment to developing infrastructure, sharing resources and resolving systems differences when needed. OMHSAS developed and continues to support training statewide to bring both agencies together to foster relationship building and offer support for complex case resolution.

The Older Adult Subcommittee works to tailor specific goals and strategies to improve services for older adults. The supporting projects and actions adopted by the Subcommittee and OMHSAS described below required strong partnerships with other DPW offices and service systems such as the Office of Medical Assistance Programs, Office of Developmental Programs, Department of Aging and Long Term Living, and the Department of Health, among others.

#### **Older Adult Supporting Projects and Actions**

- Expand older adults' access to services with the flexibility to provide services wherever needed, such as Mobile Mental Health Treatment and other supports
- Increase awareness of, planning for, and evidence-based training on suicide prevention for older adults
- Review the impact of Medicare primary and Medical Assistance as secondary payor on service provision
- Expand access to the interagency planning project for older adults with complex needs
- Expand development of peer support services specifically targeted to the needs of older adults
- Increase awareness of needs of older adults for substance abuse treatment and programs structured to accommodate those needs in a culturally competent manner
- Ensure community consumer involvement by providing support to individuals transitioning from South Mountain Restoration Center into the community
- Continue to assure appropriate mental health services for older adults experiencing dementia who have behavioral health problems
- Develop effective collaboration across systems with partners such as The Department of Aging, The Department of Health, The Behavioral Health and Aging Coalition, The Office of Medical Assistance Programs, Visiting Nurses Association, and others to promote more effective integration among behavioral/physical programs for older adults
- Continue collaborative efforts to promote "Share the Care" between OMHSAS and the Department of Aging which seek to create a statewide network to resolve complex cases related to older adults
- Network to resolve complex cases related to older adults

One of the most significant innovations in the development of supports for older adults is the ongoing work with “Share the Care,” the collaboration between the county mental health offices and the Area Agencies on Aging to improve consumer services and outcomes for older adults. Initially begun in 2005, it was a complex care review process between Aging and OMHSAS to assist with complex care resolution in three specific counties. Share the Care evolved into a statewide initiative to foster county/AAA partnership to address broader needs of older adults with behavioral health and other social needs.

An example of the effective working partnership between OMHSAS and Aging in Columbia, Montour, Snyder and Union counties is a program named “Project HELP (Helping Elders Live Productively). Project HELP focuses on three key concepts:

- Mental Health and AAA consumers have unique needs
- Staff need ongoing training, education and support
- Outreach to older adults is critical to providing effective care

A Resource Coordinator serves as a liaison between the two systems to create awareness of service gaps and identify opportunities to promote better understanding of the unique and often complex needs of older adults. The Resource Coordinator engages other service systems and provides training on protective services, depression screening, music therapy and other supports that assist caretakers for older adults.

## **Progress**

- The Older Adult Subcommittee of the OMHSAS Advisory Committee was established as a significant step in assuring appropriate, adequate services that promote recovery for older adults.
- Bulletins 06-01 (Memorandum of Understanding Between The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services and The Pennsylvania Department of Aging) and 06-02 (Service Priority For: Older Adult Population) were developed to outline services for older adults.
- The MOU “Share the Care” trainings occurred statewide.
- The development of “Attachment I” in the County Plan requires counties to attest to the development and existence of an MOU with their Area Agency on Aging.

- The curriculum for Certified Peer Specialists includes specialized training on support for older adults.
- The addition of Mobile Mental Health Treatment and Certified Peer Specialist services to the Pennsylvania Medical Assistance State Plan as in-plan services allows services to be provided in homes and other community based settings which are easier to access and less stigmatizing for older adults.
- Education and advocacy efforts include the promotion of a Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAP) and psychiatric advance directives for older adults.
- Network of Care and [www.parecovery.org](http://www.parecovery.org) contain information targeted to older adults.

## **Resources**

- Building A Recovery–Oriented Service System for Adults – Toward a Blueprint for Pennsylvania  
([http://www.parecovery.org/principles\\_change.shtml](http://www.parecovery.org/principles_change.shtml))
- Pennsylvania Older Adult Suicide Prevention Plan  
([http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/ucmprd/groups/webcontent/documents/document/s\\_002544.pdf](http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/ucmprd/groups/webcontent/documents/document/s_002544.pdf))
- Behavioral Health and Aging Resource Manual  
([http://www.parecovery.org/documents/BH\\_Aging\\_Resource\\_Manual\\_Final.doc](http://www.parecovery.org/documents/BH_Aging_Resource_Manual_Final.doc))