

TITLE: Meeting the Needs of Older Adults with Behavioral Health and Substance Use Disorders: A Statewide Asset Mapping Evaluation in Connecticut

AUTHORS:

Patricia Richardson, CIRS-A/D

Julie Robison, PhD

Kathy Kellett, PhD

Noreen Shugrue, JD, MBA, MA

Melissa Morton, MSW, CIRS-A

Jennifer Glick, BSN, RN, LMSW

INSTITUTIONS: State of Connecticut Department on Aging; Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services; UConn Health, Center on Aging

ABSTRACT BODY:

A number of factors contribute to the crisis in unmet behavioral health needs of older adults. Untreated behavioral health conditions may result in decreased quality of life, increased utilization of health care services and costs, including higher mortality rates, and in some cases unnecessary institutionalization. Led by a partnership between the State of Connecticut Department on Aging and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and with funding from the Administration for Community Living, the state's Older Adult Behavioral Health Workgroup sponsored a year-long, multi-phase study to explore the unique needs of older adults (55+) and identify assets and barriers present in the state's behavioral health services system. This study reports the findings of 4 phases, during which 10 focus groups, 10 key informant provider interviews, 5 community forums, and an electronic statewide survey were conducted with behavioral health professionals, other professionals who refer older adults to behavioral health services, and community members. Results from nearly 1,000 participants indicate that community assets include a full spectrum of services and potential areas of coordination and collaboration. Resource issues contributing to the crisis in unmet behavioral health needs include: underservice; uneven quality of care; lack of integration of behavioral health, physical health, and aging services; and financial barriers. Recommendations included developing provider/referral partnerships, expanding crisis services, promoting case management, mental health first aid curriculum, and peer-run "warmlines." The Older Adult Behavioral Health Workgroup has begun the process of prioritizing and implementing selected recommendations in the areas of: education and awareness; integration of behavioral health, physical health, and aging services; workforce development; strengthening existing community assets; policy development and research.