

Four Essential Pillars of a Comprehensive System of Care

***Prevent, identify, and address behavioral health issues
to improve health outcomes.***



Dedicate a Council for a Healthy Aging Comprehensive System of Care

- Enhance provider payment
- Align policies across State Agencies and networks
- Host annual provider cross-training event focused on geriatric well-being
- Provide oversight of the public health campaign
- Incorporate behavioral health screening across practice settings and communities
- Promote use of the most current evidence practices



Fund and Execute a Public Health Campaign

- Challenge the idea that treatment is wasted on older adults
- Decrease stigma and ageism
- Increase screening by all practitioners
- Improve attitudes and behaviors about seeking treatment



Increase Screening for Behavioral Health Issues

- Reach across practice settings including oral health, primary care, and emergency care
- Utilize screening tools in community settings
- Use protocols and interventions that are appropriate for both age and culture



Develop the Workforce

- Educate with evidence based practice
- Cross train in geriatric competencies
- Provide skill-based training at the annual provider training hosted by the Council

Dedicate a Council for a Healthy Aging Comprehensive System of Care

Behavioral health issues are a major threat to the health and independence of adults aged 65 years and older. As the population ages, the need for behavioral health services continues to increase. The consequences of failing to identify older adults in distress can result in serious injury or death, in addition to high medical costs and lost productivity.

The “senior” label represents a continuum that begins, for some, at age 50 and may extend beyond one’s hundredth year. The State Plan defines older adults as aged 65 and over. We also recognize the wide variation in health, infirmity, and life stages among this wide and diverse age group of individuals that encompass over 50 years of individual health, experience, environment, culture, support, personality, and a plethora of life changing moments.

The core purpose of the Council is to recognize older adults as a vulnerable population with incredible diversity and protect them accordingly.

Commitments to Action

1 Dedicate a council or agency division to spearhead efforts to create a comprehensive system of care for older adults.

- Council should include representation from state agencies and the community
- Focus on acquiring funding to provide services through state agencies and affiliated care providers
- Act as the authority and oversight to unite all efforts under the comprehensive system of care
- Maintain system wide integration of care that addresses the 8 dimensions of wellness

2 Build a constituency for geriatric behavioral health

- Create a system for inter-agency meetings
- Formalize a collaborative of program managers
- Organize annual summits on the topic for the Governor, Secretaries, Commissioners, and Deputies to gain support to execute detailed initiatives specific to the health of older adults

3 Organize efforts to recognize older adults and their diversity

- Enhance provider payment
- Align policies across State Agencies and community networks
- Increase funding to agencies supporting older adult behavioral health
- Provide oversight of the public health campaign
- Incorporate behavioral health screening across practice settings and communities
- Promote use of the most current evidence based practices

Fund and Execute a Public Health Campaign

Behavioral health is a public health problem. Some key elements to making older adult wellness a priority include raising public awareness and building community support. Many people are not aware of the prevalence of depression and suicide among older adults. Likewise, many are not familiar with the help available in their communities to support older adults.

Implementing a comprehensive system of care demands a strong communication plan, which addresses ageism and behavioral health stigma. Through a public health awareness campaign, Oklahomans will learn to recognize older adults at risk and provide the support they need.

The campaign will result in an understanding that behavioral health issues are not a normal part of aging, yet they are alarmingly common among older adults. Communication efforts include but are not limited to

- Helping individuals, caregivers, family, and communities recognize signs of distress
- Promoting resources in communities
- Reducing stigma related to behavioral health issues and treatment
- Challenging ageism
- Raising awareness about prevalence of older adult behavioral health issues
- Increasing recognition of The 5 D's of Suicide – Depression, Disease, Disability, Disconnectedness, and access to Deadly means

Commitments to Action

1 Change Public perceptions about older adult wellness

- Raise awareness of aging and behavioral health issues in the community
- Promote age appropriate and culturally sensitive services
- Support early identification of distress
- Increase referrals to community resources
- Reduce behavioral health stigma
- Challenge ageism

2 Engage healthcare professionals

- Educate providers with current evidence based interventions
- Popularize the development of geriatric inter-disciplinary team

3 Engage communities

- Promote the 5 D's to identify suicide risk – Depression, Disease, Disability, Disconnectedness, Deadly Means
- Promote the Department of Human Services 211 online resource guide
- Encourage community centers to make screening available
- Share resources to increase community based screening

Increase Screening

Symptoms of depression, anxiety and substance use are often overlooked in older adults. Not recognizing when an older adult is in distress can result in serious injury or death, higher medical costs, lost productivity and a lower quality of life. Even mild depression can have serious consequences for an older adult. Screenings for trauma can determine exposure to oftentimes multiple stressful life experiences.

In the community: Simple screening tools are available and can be used in a variety of community settings. There are tools designed specifically for an older adult that indicate when community support and/or professional help should be sought.

In healthcare settings: Early screening helps identify symptoms of depression, anxiety, suicide, and substance use and provides the opportunity for early intervention. Screening patients at each visit is an effective way to monitor changes in mood and behaviors because sometimes symptoms are difficult to identify. This can be done by the patient prior to the visit or while waiting for the appointment. Some reasons that symptoms may be difficult to identify are that:

- Older adults often exhibit different symptoms than younger individuals,
- It may be uncomfortable speaking about emotional problems,
- Medical illness and medication may mask or cause depression and anxiety , and
- Many may think that the depression is a normal part of aging.

Screenings for behavioral health can identify issues, prevent symptoms from worsening, reduce the need for self-medication, and prevent suicide. Screening activities may conclude with a referral to community and/or professional support that is trauma-informed and appropriate to age and culture.

Commitments to Action

1 Include behavioral health screenings with each older adult assessment, application or interview at the initial point of engagement, including:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance Use
- Suicide

2 Increase Referrals to

- Age appropriate and culturally sensitive services
- Supportive services in the community

3 Promote screenings in both community and professional settings

4 Provide screening tools, technical assistance on utilizing and interpreting the tools; technical assistance in locating local resources

5 Explore reimbursement options or increase in payment for screening

Develop the Workforce

- By 2030 older adults will make up 20% of the American population. ¹
- Projected 2025 Geriatrician supply and demand in the South Region: 2,150 professionals to meet the demand for over 8,000 with a difference of more than 6,000. ²
- Over the next three decades, older Oklahomans (60+) are projected to be 25% of the total population, a sizeable increase from today's 19%. By 2035, 1 in 4 Oklahomans will be over the age of 60 years. ³
- From 2010 to 2040, Oklahoma is estimated to experience a 75% increase in demand for Geriatricians. ⁴

The development of the existing workforce requires increasing provider knowledge and skills to provide appropriate services to older adults. Educational systems should work to incorporate key elements of geriatric competencies. Incorporating Assessment for trauma through ACE scores can improve appropriateness of referral and effectiveness of the intervention.

Training should include the following:

- The eight dimensions of wellness and social determinants of health
- Cultural competency reflecting generational differences
- Geriatric skill-based training
- ACE assessment
- Trauma informed care approaches
- Differences in the way symptoms present in the older adult

- The aging body tolerates alcohol and other substances different due to the normal aging process, metabolic changes and medications (National Institute on Aging) ⁵
- Substance tolerance changes and indicators of a possible substance use disorder (SUD)

Commitments to Action

- 1** Increase the awareness of the need for culturally sensitive and age-appropriate services
- 2** Use the current networks – Aging, Physical Health, Behavioral Health and Disability to cross train leaders on the variety of older adult issues and resources
- 3** Cross-train both clinical and non-clinical staff in each practice setting about the signs, symptoms and degrees of treatment available and effective for older adults
- 4** Utilize Older Adult Peer Support Specialists
 - Extend the workforce and provide services in non-traditional settings
 - Alleviate the stigma associated with seeking help
- 5** Explore reimbursement options or increase in payment for screening
- 6** Expand required training to include the use of screening tools and appropriate referrals
- 7** Include screening modules in electronic medical record systems

Creating a Comprehensive System of Care: Oklahoma's Call to Action

As people age, most of the focus is on mobility, chronic disease, medications, pain, nutrition and cognitive changes. However, the mind-body connection cannot be denied. Behavioral health issues are a major threat to the health and independence of adults aged 65 years and older. The consequences of failing to identify older adults in distress can result in serious injury or death, in addition to high medical costs and lost productivity.

By answering this call to action you are committing to the development of a comprehensive spectrum of mental health and support services organized to meet the changing needs of aging adults, ranging from Boomer age to the advanced age population. Such a system will connect care, benefits, financial assistance, and various other support services into a user-friendly system that allows the individual to access the assistance that is available to older adults.

Thank you for answering this call to create an integrated and comprehensive system of care for older adults. Integration weaves together the points and sources of care with available resources to identify and support older adults at risk, screen to identify issues, and referral to age appropriate and culturally sensitive services and community resources.