



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR
OLDER ADULT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM INFORMATION SHEET¹

Behavioral health investment

The behavioral health investment 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 of older adults 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 and people with disabilities.

What is the behavioral health investment?

Oregon is investing in 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 people with disabilities. And over time, through sharing and adoption of best practices, the cost of care will actually be reduced.

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

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

Older Adult Behavioral Health Specialists' Functions

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

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

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

Workforce development and Community Education and Awareness

- Increase direct service staff knowledge of normal aging processes, as well as 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

In May 2015, the first OABHS were hired. Now there are OABHS throughout the state, engaging with key stakeholders in their communities to reduce gaps in services for older adults and people with disabilities who have behavioral health needs. In addition, they are conducting training and are participating in complex case consultation.

As a part of the initiative, Portland State University's Institute on Aging (PSU), under contract with OHA, produced eight training modules for the OABHS to use for aging and behavioral health professional workforce development, five training modules for primary care providers, and three training modules for community audiences. In addition, PSU presented three "Learning Sessions" designed to support OABHS with information and tools for building capacity in their communities. PSU is currently conducting an evaluation of the Initiative.

For more information contact:

Nirmala Dhar, Older Adult BH Coordinator, Oregon Health Authority, Health Systems Division
Desk: 503-945-9715 Fax: 503-947-5546 Email: nirmala.dhar@dhsoha.state.or.us