



**OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH
AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE
SERVICES BULLETIN**

ISSUE DATE:

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EFFECTIVE DATE:

August 23, 2022

NUMBER:

OMHSAS-22-06

SUBJECT:

**Revised Bulletin for Services to Older
Adults**

BY:

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Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services**

SCOPE:

County Mental Health/Intellectual Disability Programs and Mental Health Crisis Intervention Service Providers.

PURPOSE:

To ensure that appropriate community based mental health services, treatments, and supports are provided to meet the needs of the older adult population experiencing symptoms of a mental illness.

BACKGROUND:

In 2019, Pennsylvania ranked 7th in the United States with the largest number of adults 65 and older. In the U.S., between 2020 and 2030, the number of older adults is projected to increase by almost 18 million, a 39% increase. The fastest growing segment of the population during the next two decades is expected to be in the age 85 and older group. Social isolation and limited access to supports negatively impacts the well-being of older adults.

Depression, anxiety, addiction, and other mental illnesses are not a normal part of aging and should not be considered as such. As individuals age the support networks utilized to help manage symptoms of a mental illness may change resulting in individuals seeking services for the first time in their lives.

The development of depressive disorders occurs frequently in older adults making it critical that comprehensive mental health evaluations are conducted based on presenting symptoms regardless of age. It is important for providers to evaluate for suicidality given that older adult males have the highest suicide completion rate of any age group.

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS BULLETIN SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO:
Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Bureau of Policy, Planning and Program Development, P.O. Box 2675, Harrisburg, PA 17105. General Office Number 717-772-7900

Older persons diagnosed with a neurocognitive disorder, including dementia, who are experiencing symptoms of a mental illness, including depression, anxiety, substance use disorder, post-traumatic stress syndromes and behavioral agitation are guaranteed access to mental health services under laws and regulations of the Commonwealth.

POLICY:

Please inform your local provider network of the urgency of addressing the mental health and crisis services needs of older adults and work with them to develop appropriate services and ensure access to those services by senior adults.

The Mental Health Procedures Act (MHPA) of July 9, 1976, P.L. 817, No. 143, clearly states "Persons who are intellectually disabled, senile, alcoholic, or drug-dependent shall receive mental health treatment if they are also diagnosed as mentally ill, but these conditions of themselves shall not be deemed to constitute mental illness."

The MHPA includes individuals who are experiencing symptoms of a mental illness regardless of whether the individual is known to have a diagnosis or not. MHPA does not state or imply that a person experiencing a neurocognitive disorder, such as dementia, can be denied a mental health assessment and mental health treatment when presenting with symptoms of a mental illness.

OBSOLETE:

The issuance of this bulletin renders the bulletin OMHSAS-06-02 obsolete.