



2010 Priorities of the National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging

NCMHA is comprised of over 80 members representing professional, consumer and government organizations with expertise in mental health and aging issues. Its goal is to work together towards improving the availability and quality of mental health preventive and treatment services to older Americans and their families. In preparation for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA), NCMHA developed and endorsed resolutions supporting the critical need to address older adult mental health and substance abuse issues.

Consider these facts: Almost 20% of persons age 55 and over experience specific mental and cognitive disorders that are not part of the “normal” aging process. The need and demand for mental health and substance abuse services is expected to increase due to the growing older population and the increased acceptance and utilization of mental health services by aging baby boomers. However, two-thirds of older adults with a mental disorder do not receive needed services. Tragically, older adults have the highest suicide rate of any age group, with persons 65 years of age and older having a rate almost double and older white men having a rate almost six times the suicide rate of the general population. This is unfortunate as there ARE effective interventions for most mental health and substance abuse disorders experienced by older persons. The broad importance of and support for this issue was evidenced at the 2005 WHCoA, with seventy-five percent (929 out of 1,200) of Conference national delegates voting to improve "recognition, assessment, and treatment of mental illness and depression among older Americans." This resolution on mental health ranked #8 of all policy priorities resulting from the conference.

This problem remains a critical one that should continue to be addressed in all current and future deliberations and efforts to foster the health and well being of older adults, their caregivers, and families. Therefore, NCMHA revisited its 2005 WHCoA recommendations and have identified 15 as its 2010 Priorities. **We are once again encouraging individuals and organizations to become actively involved at the national, state, and local level to foster efforts to address the mental health and substance abuse needs of older Americans.**

1. Assure access to an affordable and comprehensive range of quality mental health and substance abuse services, including:
 - outreach
 - home and community based services
 - prevention, and
 - intervention, coordinated with acute and long-term services and supports.

2. Assure that these services are age, gender and linguistically appropriate, culturally competent and consumer driven.

3. Promote the development and implementation of home and community-based services as an alternative to institutionalization through a variety of public and private funding mechanisms.
4. Promote older adult mental health and substance abuse services research, and coordinate and finance the movement of evidence-based prevention, early intervention and treatment, from research into services, including healthy aging and chronic disease management programs.
5. Support the integration of older adult mental health and substance abuse services into primary health care, long-term services and supports and community-based service systems.
6. Promote screening for co-occurring mental and substance use disorders by primary health, mental health and substance abuse providers and encourage the development of integrated treatment strategies.
7. Increase collaboration among aging, health, mental health and substance abuse consumer organizations, disability organizations, veterans, women's, LGBT and advocacy groups, professional associations, academic institutions, research entities, and all relevant government agencies to promote more effective use of resources and to reduce fragmentation of services.
8. Conduct a public/private education campaign to educate consumers, family members, providers and the public on healthy aging and mental wellness and the identification and promise of effective treatments for mental health disorders in older adults, incorporating consumer choice/empowerment and involving consumers to promote the benefits of mental health prevention and treatment in older adults.
9. Reduce the stigma associated with mental disorders in older adults, and reduce age-related prejudice and discrimination regarding mental disorders.
10. Develop and implement a national strategy for older adult suicide prevention.
11. Ensure services and supports for family caregivers that provide access to vital support services, including mental health and substance abuse service.
12. Promote the health and well being of older adults through the prevention, detection, treatment, intervention and prosecution of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation.
13. Promote the capacity of state long-term care ombudsman programs to recognize and respond to complaints of elder abuse and neglect and mental health and substance abuse concerns.
14. Designate an older adult mental health leader or coordinator in AoA, and other appropriate HHS, federal, state and local agencies responsible for mental health services.
15. Address severe provider and faculty shortages in mental health, behavioral health and substance abuse for older adults by expanding geriatric traineeships for a broad range of mental health and health professionals, and targeting national financial incentives such as loan forgiveness programs and continuing education funding.

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