

Helping Professionals in the Community in Understanding and Recognizing Mental Health Disorders in Community-Dwelling Seniors

Dr. Bonnie M. Dobbs (PhD)

Dr. Diane McNeil (PhD)

Tara Pidborochynski (MSc)

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Learning Objectives

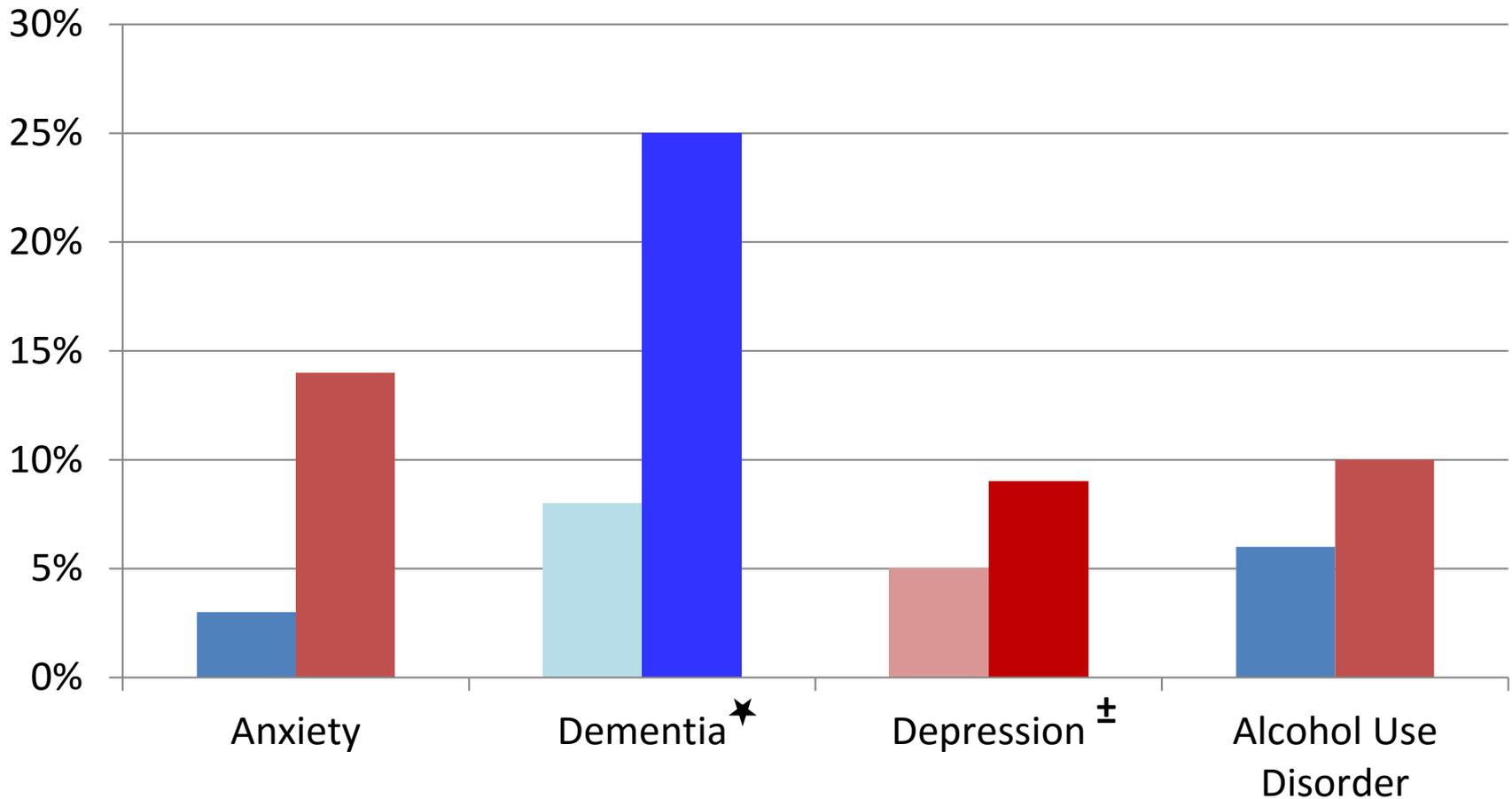
- Create awareness of prevalence of mental health disorders in community-dwelling seniors
- Provide an overview of the 4 most common mental health disorders in community-dwelling seniors
- Provide professionals with information needed to improve early identification and facilitate early referral

What is Mental Health?

- The capacity of each of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, inter-connections, and personal dignity

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006, p. 3)

Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders in Community-Dwelling Seniors

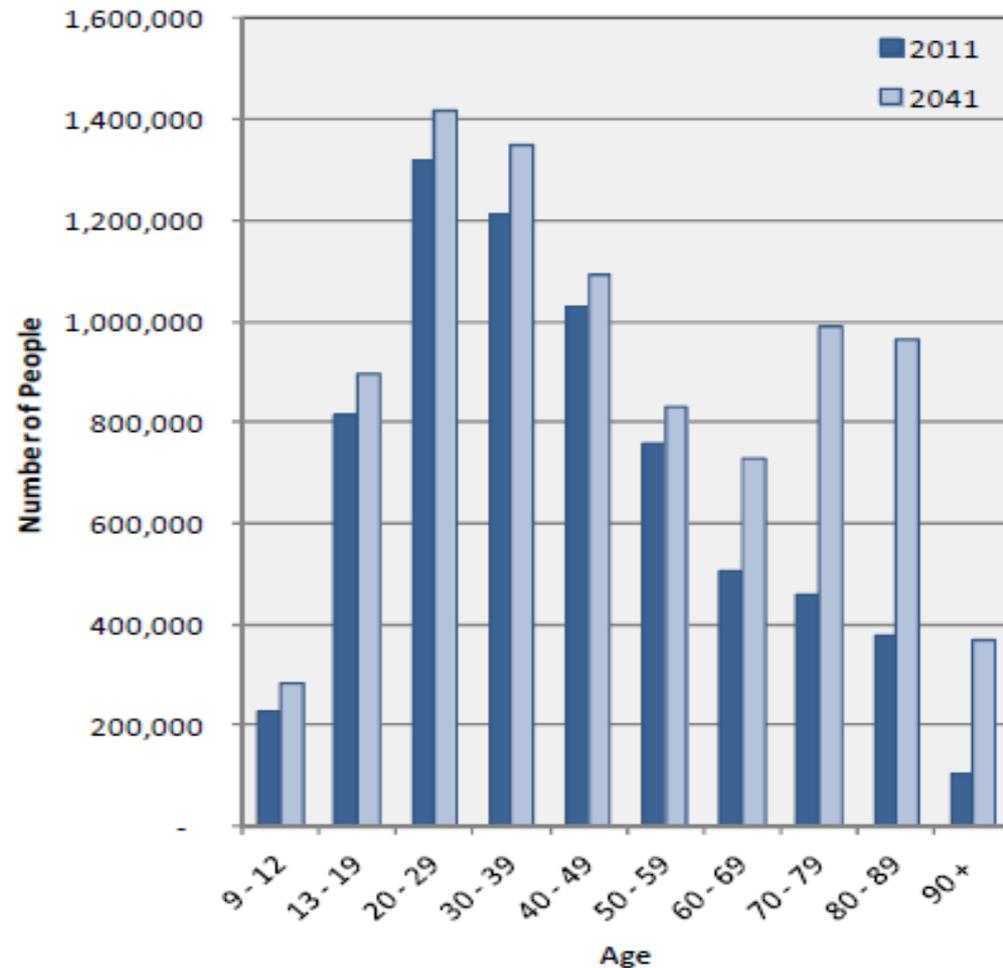


...In Alberta

- ~ 1 in 5 seniors are treated for mental illness
- Mental health disorders projected to increase in Canada over next several decades (primarily due to population increases and aging of the population)
- Costs to Canadian economy: \$42.3 billion dollars direct costs (2011)

(Smetinan et al., 2011)

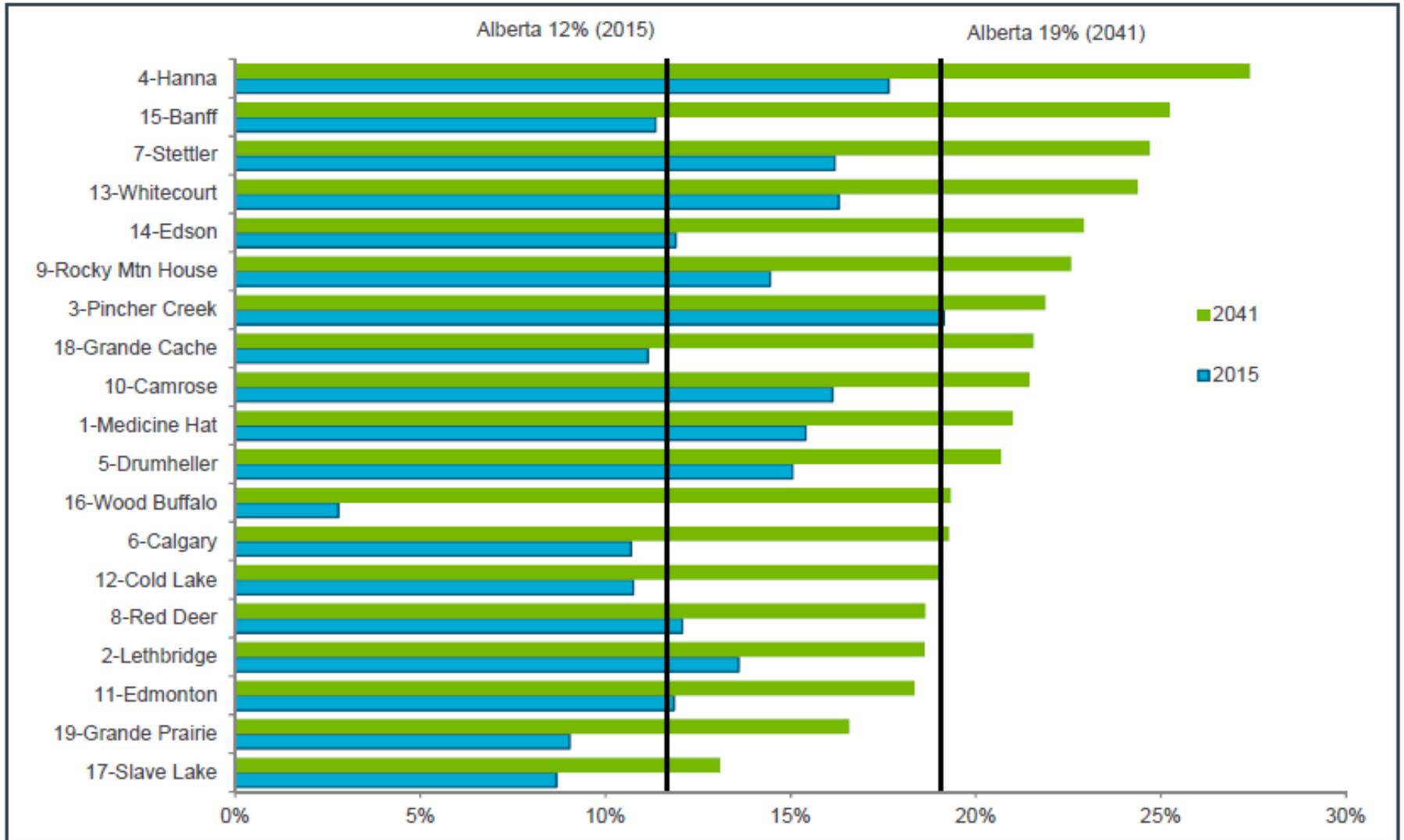
Mental Illness* in the Population



*Mental Illness includes mood and anxiety disorders, SUD, schizophrenia, ADHD, ODD, Conduct Disorders, and Dementia

(Smetinan et al., 2011)

Figure 13: Population Aged 65 and over as a Percent of Total Population, Census Divisions, 2015 and 2041



Sources: Statistics Canada and Alberta Treasury Board and Finance

Most Common Mental Health Disorders in Community-Dwelling Seniors

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Dementia
- Alcohol Misuse



Anxiety

Mrs. Helen Jones is a 73-year-old woman who calls her doctor's office often. She is frequently concerned about physical symptoms that come and go, and she has many questions about her medications. The nurses recognize her voice the minute she says hello. When Helen visits her physician, she always has a long list of questions, symptoms, and concerns.

She has always been a worrier, but things got much worse after her husband of 40 years died five years ago. He had been a significant source of reassurance for her. Once she was alone, she had to find other people to check in with about her worries. Her daughter reports that Helen calls her too often with questions about her health, the grandchildren, and her finances. However, when asked about excessive anxiety or worry by her physician, Helen says, "Oh, no, I don't worry. I just think too much." In addition, Helen does not sleep well; she wakes up often with worries on her mind and cannot get back to sleep. Helen's daughter also reports that she has been irritable more frequently than in the past.

Adapted from Calleo & Stanley, 2008 |



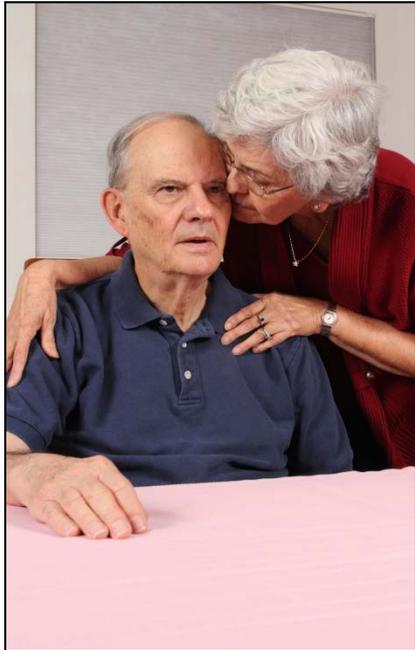
Depression

Mrs. Rose is a 72-year-old woman who lives by herself in the house that she and her now deceased husband bought in their early 20's. She has been very engaged with her community in the past – serving on the library board, helping with community functions, and volunteering at the Senior's Centre.

She has not been sleeping well of late and often awakes in the morning feeling exhausted. Recently, she finds herself just nibbling at her food as her appetite isn't what it used to be and she doesn't feel like eating. She also feels quite sad and has had a number of crying spells throughout the day for the past few weeks.

She was to meet her friend for lunch today followed by a weekly fitness class but has decided that she just doesn't have the energy to do her hair and makeup or to select clothes for this outing. She thinks that a bit of cleaning and tidying up her house would make her feel better but can't seem to muster up the energy to even wash the dishes in the sink. She decides to go back to bed, and stays there the rest of the day.

Dementia



Mr. Henry LeBlanc is a 76-year-old male who resides in his own 2-storey house where he enjoys listening to the radio and the occasional record and tending to his small backyard garden. He has never married and does not have any children. He retired from his job as a letter carriers when he was 67. He uses his own car for occasional trips but has expressed concern lately about getting lost when he drives outside of his neighbourhood.

Henry has been attending an Adult Day Program attached to a Seniors' Centre twice a week. Over the past month or so, Day Program staff have noted that Mr. LeBlanc's personal appearance is deteriorating - he sometimes wears soiled clothes, and his hair is not always clean or even combed. He has attended the Adult Day Program on the wrong day on three occasions in the past two months, and he seems to be forgetting the names of staff and other participants, even those whose names he knew. He appears more withdrawn and seems to have trouble following the threads of conversation at the program. A social worker at the Adult Day Program has referred him for a geriatric assessment.

Alcohol Misuse



Mr. Jean Carter, who just turned 73, was found on the floor of the small frame house in which he has lived for the last 35 years. Since his wife died five years ago, he has lived there alone. Mr. Carter misses his wife - her affection and teasing and the little things she gave him that had always made him feel special. Mr. Carter's five children have grown concerned about their father who is showing signs of increased general physical debilitation, confusion, and poor memory. They also are saddened that their father's well-kept house is in disarray.

When found by the neighbour, Mr. Carter was confused and sweating; his speech was slurred and he was uncharacteristically irritable. When the neighbor bent down to check on Mr. Carter, she thought she noticed the smell of alcohol. The neighbour, who has lived next door to Mr. Carter for 20 years, thought she must be mistaken because she has known Mr. Carter to consume alcohol only on special occasions, and even then, he only took a sip or two. A few months ago, an older gentleman moved into the neighborhood and they became friendly. He, too, is a widow. Many afternoons, Mr. Carter and his neighbour get together for "tea," meaning drinks with vodka or rum and fruit juices.

Breakout Questions

1. What are the barriers to identifying mental health disorders in seniors in your community?
2. What facilitators are there (e.g., collaboration across service providers, health care professionals, etc.)?
3. What resources *do you currently have* to support seniors with mental health disorders in your community?
4. What resources *do you need* to support seniors with mental health disorders in your community?

Resources – Information Sheets

ANXIETY IN SENIORS

What is Anxiety?

Another word for anxiety is being worried or afraid. Many people get worried from time to time about things like family or money.

Too much worry or fear over a long period of time can lead to health problems. There are different types of anxiety disorders. Some people with anxiety disorders are afraid of certain places or things; some are very worried about many things.

The most common type of anxiety disorder in seniors is called 'generalized anxiety disorder'. People with this disorder feel very worried or afraid most of the time about many things even though there is very little real reason to be worried.

People with anxiety can feel this way for a long time. They often think that the worst is going to happen. Feeling this way can keep people from doing the usual things in their daily lives.

How Common is Anxiety?

About 3% to 14% of seniors have an anxiety disorder. The problem is that many seniors don't know that they have an anxiety disorder. This means that many seniors with an anxiety disorder are not being helped.

What are the Signs of Anxiety?

Signs of an anxiety disorder can include one or more of the following:

- Always worrying and being afraid
- Wanting to stay away from other people
- Having a hard time sleeping
- Having a fast heart rate or sweating
- Feeling like throwing up
- Taking short breaths
- Feeling weak or shaky

How Can I Get Help?

If you think you have an anxiety disorder, talk to your family doctor. Your family doctor can help to make a diagnosis. Medication and therapy are treatments that may help.

Web Resources on Anxiety

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
www.camh.ca/en/hospital/health_information/a_z_mental_health_and_addiction_information/anxiety_disorders/pages/anxiety_disorders.aspx

The Canadian Mental Health Association Edmonton (CMHA)
edmonton.cmha.ca/mentalhealth/understanding-mentalillness/anxiety-disorders/

Anxiety Canada
www.anxietycanada.ca/english/pdf/ElderlyEn.pdf

MyHealth Alberta
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/Pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=anxyt>

Additional Resources

Health Link Alberta
Toll Free: 1-866-408-5465
www.albertahealthservices.ca/223.asp

For health information and advice from healthcare professionals



DEPRESSION IN SENIORS

What is Depression?

People who are depressed often feel sad or down for several days at a time. They may also feel tired, sleep much more or less than usual, or have overall feelings of guilt. Being depressed for a long time can lead to health problems.

How Common is Depression?

Depression affects 2% of seniors living in the community. Often, seniors who are stressed, single, divorced, or widowed are more likely to be depressed.

What are the Signs of Depression?

Signs of depression could include one or more of the following:

- Always feeling sad, worthless, or hopeless
- Having problems sleeping
- Having problems concentrating
- Loss of interest in activities
- Wanting to be alone
- Not taking care of yourself
- Eating much more or less than usual
- Gaining or losing weight
- Thinking a lot about suicide or dying

How Can I Get Help?

If you think you are depressed, talk to your family doctor. Your family doctor can help to make a diagnosis. Medication and therapy are treatments that may help.

Web Resources on Depression

The Canadian Mental Health Association Edmonton
www.cmha.ca/mentalhealth/understanding-mentalillness/depression/

Depression Hurts
www.depressionhurts.ca

Depression in Older Adults and the Elderly
www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_elderly.htm

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Resources – Information Sheets

DEMENTIA IN SENIORS

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a group of diseases that result in changes in a person's ability to think and reason and to manage their own life. Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia are two common forms of dementia.

How Common is Dementia?

Overall, 5% of people 65 years of age and older have some form of dementia. The risk of having dementia doubles every five years. That is, about 2% of people at age 65 have dementia, increasing to 4% at age 70, 8% at age 75, and so on.

What are the Signs of Dementia?

Signs of dementia include:

- Not remembering certain things
- Not knowing where you are
- Forgetting where you put certain things
- Not being able to do things because of memory loss
- Having problems communicating with others
- Changes in mood, behavior, and personality
- Behaving in ways that are inappropriate

How Can I Get Help?

If you are worried about your memory or are having any of the signs of dementia listed above, talk to your family doctor. Your family doctor can help to make a diagnosis. There are medications that may help. There also are support groups for both the individual with dementia and for family members.

Web Resources on Dementia

Alzheimer Society Alberta and North West Territories
www.alzheimer.ab.ca/

Alzheimer Society of Canada
www.alzheimer.ca/en/Living-withdementia

AHS: Alzheimer Centres
www.albertahealthservices.ca/services

Additional Resources

Health Link Alberta
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www.albertahealthservices.ca/223.asp

For health information and advice from healthcare professionals



SUBSTANCE (ALCOHOL) USE IN SENIORS

What is Substance Use Disorder?

When people have 'substance use disorder' it means they can misuse a number of different substances such as alcohol and drugs. Substance use disorders can lead to increased stress and depression. Alcohol is the most commonly misused substance in Canadian seniors. Alcohol misuse can cause problems at home or work. It also may cause you to put yourself in dangerous situations (e.g., car crashes, injuries).

How Common is Alcohol Misuse?

Between 6% and 10% of Canadian seniors have some form of alcohol use disorder.

What are the Signs of Alcohol Misuse?

Signs of alcohol misuse could include:

- Personality changes
- Not taking care of your responsibilities
- Having some memory problems
- Having poor coordination
- Having poor concentration
- Slower reaction times
- Having difficulty sleeping, or eating much more or less than usual

How Can I Get Help?

If you think you have a problem with alcohol misuse, talk to your family doctor and/or see a trained professional such as an addictions counsellor. Alcohol misuse may be treated with support groups and therapy, and in some cases medication may be used.

Web Resources on Substance Use Disorders

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.aacanada.com

Canadian Network of Substance Abuse
<http://www.ccsa.ca>

Substance Use in Older Adults
<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?hwid=ug4806>

Additional Resources

Health Link Alberta
Toll Free: 1-866-408-5465
www.albertahealthservices.ca/223.asp

For health information and advice from healthcare professionals

Addiction Helpline
Toll Free: 1-866-332-2322





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