

Good health adds life to years

WORLD HEALTH DAY
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Seniors and Mental Health

Mental health problems are common among seniors and may include isolation, affective and anxiety disorders, dementia, and psychosis, among others. Many seniors also suffer from sleep and behavioral disorders, cognitive deterioration or confusion states as a result of physical disorders or surgical interventions. Research suggests that seniors benefit from supportive social connections and close personal relationships but suffer as a result of disrupted personal ties and loneliness.

Health-care providers, especially those in primary care, can play a central role in promoting mental health for seniors by working with mental health professionals, local governments, civil society organizations, families, and communities to provide comprehensive mental health care and supportive environments. In addition, older people should be encouraged to actively participate in their communities and in society at large, while policymakers should ensure that seniors' mental health concerns are addressed in national health planning and policies.

Key facts

- At least one in four older adults experiences some mental disorder, such as depression, anxiety, or dementia.
- Due to population aging, the number of seniors with mental disorders is expected to double by 2030.
- Depression is the most common mental health problem in older people.
- People aged 85 and older have the highest suicide rate of any age group.
- Two-thirds of seniors with mental health problems do not get the treatment they need (the "treatment gap").
- Mental health services for older adults are extremely limited in most countries of the Americas.

Links

PAHO Mental Health program:

http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=1167&Itemid=353

More information on mental health from WHO:

http://www.who.int/topics/mental_health/en/