

MASSACHUSETTS AGING AND MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

THE NEED

One in four older adults in the U.S. has behavioral health concerns, such as social isolation, depression, substance use, and dementia. A recent Massachusetts (MA) study found that 31% of MA residents 65 or older have been diagnosed with depression at some point and, in some communities, the rate is closer to 49% (MA Healthy Data Report, 2018). The MA Data Report also showed that rates of depression significantly increased in more than 40% of communities across the Commonwealth, since the last Report in 2014. These statistics reflect an important and growing need for community based behavioral health services for older adults.

MA is one of the first states to receive the designation of Age Friendly. For older adults to be fully engaged in community life, behavioral health concerns must be addressed. The need for advocacy and collaboration is vital and the Massachusetts Aging and Mental Health Coalition (MAMHC) has been a key force in these efforts.

ABOUT THE MASSACHUSETTS AGING AND MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

MAMHC is a statewide membership organization dedicated to improving awareness of the critical problems older adults face when experiencing mental health conditions, dementia or substance use concerns. MAMHC was established to advocate for a system of accessible and quality mental health services for all older adults in MA. It was formed to create a strong and independent voice outside of State government.

Membership in MAMHC is open to all individuals and organizations that serve the needs of older adults including providers from senior centers, ASAPs, housing, health care, education, faith-based organizations, advocacy groups, older adult consumers and caregivers. Since its founding in 1999, MAMHC membership has grown to include the National Association of Social Workers, the Massachusetts Association of Mental Health, Massachusetts Councils on Aging, Mass Home Care, and the Boston University Center for Aging & Disability Education and Research among many others.

HIGHLIGHTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The development of solid, working public and private partnerships has fueled the Coalition's success at furthering our advocacy agenda. Our accomplishments include:

- Formed a public-private partnership of key stakeholders comprised of the Massachusetts Aging and Mental Health Coalition, the MA Department of Mental Health, the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and the MA Department of Public Health. From a common recognition of need this partnership, known as the Elder Mental Health Collaborative, is now officially a subcommittee of DMH's State Mental Health Planning Council.
- Successfully advocated for funding to: 1) provide training to staff and volunteers who work directly with older adults in the community; 2) expand the workforce of peer counselors and recovery coaches specially trained and certified to work with older adults; and 3) support the expansion of designated community sites that provide outreach, mobile mental health and wraparound elder behavioral health services.
- Built awareness of the pressing need for behavioral health services for older adults and advocated to create greater urgency among state lawmakers and top officials to take action on these issues.
- Sponsored annual conferences showcasing advances in older adult behavioral health services and highlighting best practices across the state. Featured speakers have included leading practitioners in aging and mental health, top state officials, and clinicians presenting on innovative pilot projects.

For more information on the Massachusetts Aging and Mental Health Coalition; Contact: Cassie Cramer, Co-chair, cassie.cramer@eldercare.org or Frank Baskin, Co-chair, frankbaskin.gerisocialwork@yahoo.com