

Preface

Background

Concerns that substance use, mental health and gambling problems often go unrecognized and untreated in older adults led staff at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) to form the CAMH Healthy Aging Project with community partners in 2002. The project invited clinical supervisors, home care co-ordinators, community volunteers, personal support workers and others who provide care and assistance to older adults in Ontario to participate in a needs assessment and in focus groups on this issue (Barr et al, 2004; Greene et al., 2003). The feedback staff received indicated that substance use, mental health and gambling problems were prevalent in the older adults they served. Some participants described themselves as having to act in capacities beyond their mandated role; many expressed an urgent need for knowledge, training and support to address these issues.

This sense of urgency led the CAMH Healthy Aging Project to work to meet these resource and training needs. Our first publication, *Responding to Older Adults with Substance Use, Mental Health and Gambling Challenges: A Guide for Workers and*

Volunteers, was developed to raise the awareness and comfort level of front-line staff and volunteers working with older adults who may have these problems. It is a concise, helpful, easy-to-read booklet, which has been distributed widely across the province and is available for you to provide to your staff and volunteers.

This second publication, *Improving Our Response*, was developed to complement *Responding to Older Adults*; it helps supervisors and managers follow through with support beyond what non-regulated staff and volunteers can offer.

Who is this guide for?

The guide is written for professional, clinical and administrative staff in agencies and facilities that serve older adults, including home and community support services, retirement and long-term care homes and supportive housing. This includes nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and management staff. The guide will also be a useful resource for educators and for mental health and addiction treatment providers.

Readers in this broad audience will have varying levels of knowledge about these issues. Regardless of their level of knowledge and experience in mental health, addiction or gerontology, they will likely find some new nuggets of information in this guide or a new strategy that may lead to improved outcomes and new ideas of potential community partners to work with.

Readers will similarly vary in the level of direct care they provide. Although the book is primarily written for those who interact directly with the older adults in their care, it is also intended for those who are more removed but who need to be familiar with the issues and approaches in order to be able to advise and support their staff.

What's in the guide?

The guide includes information, tools and guidance to help service providers:

- recognize and understand substance use, mental health and gambling problems in older adults
- raise awareness about these issues and decrease stigma associated with them
- approach older people with these problems in a proactive, sensitive, positive and helpful way
- screen for problems and refer older adults to appropriate services
- guide and support staff, families and other caregivers
- access the addiction and mental health treatment systems
- make a positive difference in the lives of those affected by these issues.

In addition, this guide contains a series of information sheets on specific mental health and addiction issues that are targeted to older adults, their families and caregivers. Please feel free to photocopy these sheets for clients, families and other service providers. Also included is a list of recommended web, print and community resources for further information and support.

Recognizing the reality of a demanding work schedule, we encourage readers to seek out the information needed in any section of interest, with the understanding that reading the entire book when time allows will provide the best overall picture.

We hope you will find this a helpful and enlightening resource.