



# **Building Momentum & Capacity to Address Older Adult Mental Health & Substance Use in North Carolina**

**Mental Health, Substance Use and Aging**

**2016 Statewide Conference**

**NC Mental Health, Substance Use & Aging Coalition**

**Presenter: Dr. C. Ray Taylor**

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# Mental Health First Aid® USA

FOR OLDER ADULTS AND THOSE  
DEALING WITH LATER-LIFE ISSUES



NATIONAL COUNCIL  
FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



# Mental Health First Aid for Older Adults

A mental health first aid training supplement

Addresses the unique needs of older adults

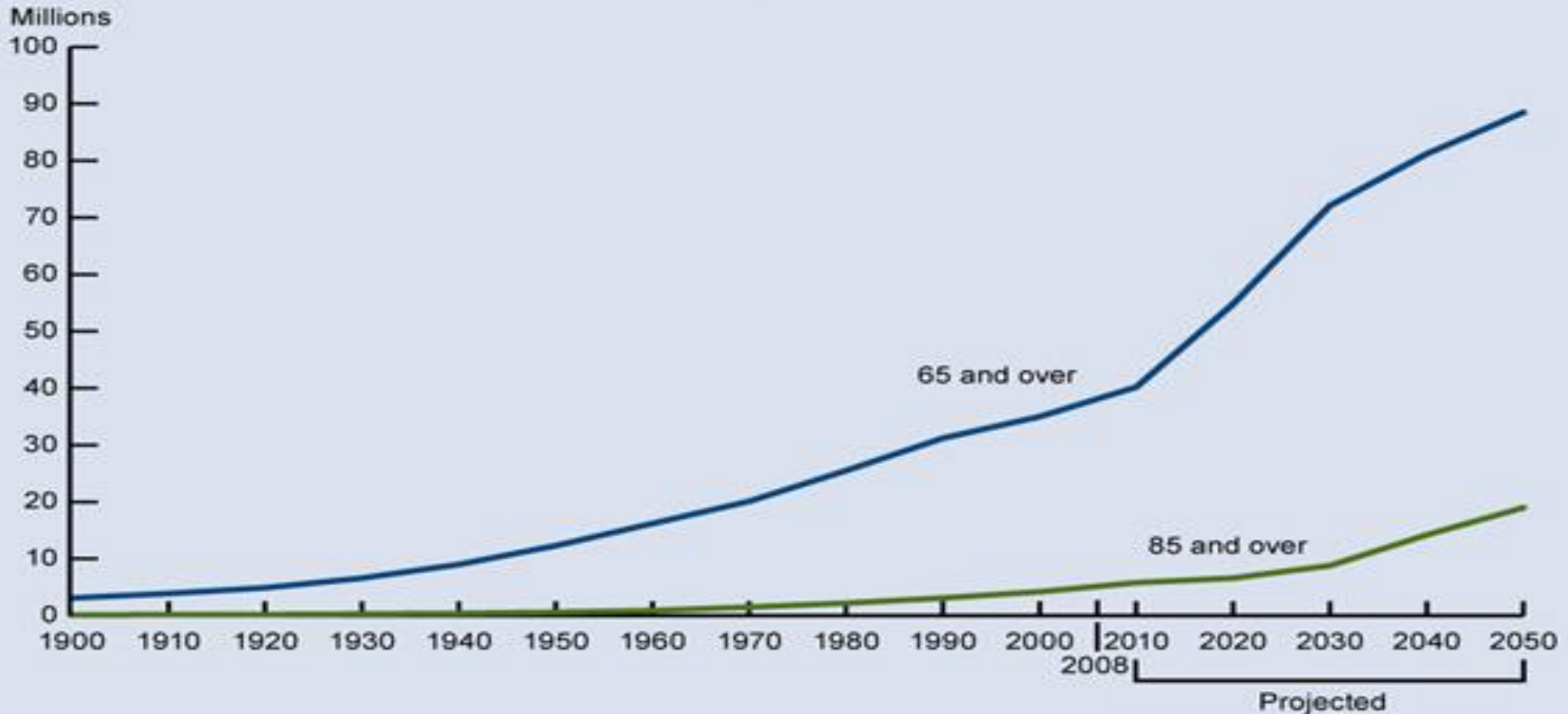
Aimed at supporting more Americans to age healthily and happily

- Eight hour training course neither replaces other beneficial training nor does it result in participant ‘clinician’ status!
- Symptoms like apathy, sleep disturbances and appetite changes are often attributed to physical health conditions, dementias or even as a normal part of the aging process.
- As more Americans are educated about the mental health and substance use challenges of older adults & how to help and support them, more Americans can age successfully.
- *“Mental Health First Aid for Older Adults teaches people how to identify risk factors and signs of mental health and substance use problems most commonly experienced by older people. Mental Health First Aid equips us with the knowledge and skills we need to reach out and offer support at a time when it is greatly needed.”* (Linda Rosenberg, President and CEO of the National Council)

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/2015/05/mental-health-first-aid-seeks-help-older-adults-mental-health-problems/>

# Why MHFA Focused on Older Adults?

**Population age 65 and over and age 85 and over, selected years 1900–2008 and projected 2010–2050**



NOTE: Data for 2010–2050 are projections of the population.  
Reference population: These data refer to the resident population.  
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, Population Estimates and Projections.



# What Is Mental Health First Aid?

## **Mental Health First Aid is...**

- the help offered to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis;
- the first aid is given until appropriate treatment and support are received or until the crisis resolves.

# Why Mental Health First Aid?

- Mental health problems are common
- Stigma is associated with mental health problems
- Many people are not well informed about mental health problems
- Professional help is not always on hand
- People often do not know how to respond
- People with mental health problems often do not seek help

# Mental Health First Aid for Older Adults Addresses Some of the Challenges

- High prevalence of certain mental health disorders
  - depression, anxiety, substance use and misuse
- Low rate of use of mental health services
  - challenges primary care providers to shift to an integrative model of delivery where mental health issues are explored
- Differing cultural beliefs about mental health issues
  - require improved cultural competence on the part of professional
- Stigma associated with mental illness
  - mental illness and aging can often be a double stigma

## Older Adults and Those with Later-Life Issues

- There are more than 6 million Americans aged 85 and older. This fastest growing subset of US population will exceed 18 million by the year 2050 when the youngest baby boomers turn 86 (*The National Council on Aging*).
- By 2030, just over 20% of US population will be over age 65.
- Older adults and care partners are less likely to identify a problem as a symptom of a mental health disorder.
- Older adults have high rates of late-onset mental health disorders, like anxiety and depression, and low rates of identification and treatment.



## Older Adults and Those with Later-Life Issues

- There is negative bi-directional impact between mental disorders and health conditions. Even “mild” mental illness symptoms can have catastrophic consequences in vulnerable older adults.
- The Mental Health First Aid for Older Adults and Those with Later-Life Issues module builds upon the strengths of the standard MHFA curriculum by focusing on knowledge and skills useful to recognize and respond to older adults showing signs of mental illness including delirium and dementia.
- Implications for caregivers, families, & professionals are discussed.
- This Older Adult curriculum module provides updated prevalence data, videos and scenarios.

# Mental Health First Aid: The Action Plan



- **A**ssess for risk of suicide or harm
- **L**isten nonjudgmentally
- **G**ive reassurance and information
- **E**ncourage appropriate professional help
- **E**ncourage self-help and other support strategies

# MHFA for Older Adults: Nontraditional Approaches to Build Momentum & Capacity

- Avoid stigmatizing terms, i.e., alcoholic, addict
- Provide MHFA for older adults in the setting they prefer, i.e., primary care, senior center, home, faith-based meeting facility
- Take an educational prevention/intervention approach with older adults
- Address and reduce physical barriers, i.e., assistance with transportation
- Recruit & engage professionals who have a trusted relationship with older adults
- Train communities, including aging services providers, behavioral health and primary care providers, community leaders, faith-based leaders, families and friends of older adults in MHFA, to be gatekeepers who can identify and refer at-risk older adults to behavioral health providers
- Increase cultural competence among providers so as to support and strengthen behavioral health services.