

Older adults have unique mental health challenges and needs

Editor's Note: This is the sixth in a six-part series highlighting Mental Health Awareness Month.

By **PATRICIA BUTLER**
For The Telegraph

As May is Mental Health Awareness Month, May 18 marked Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day. You may wonder what is unique about the mental health needs for older adults. Each stage of life contains its own opportunities and challenges, and changes in physical and mental status throughout the life cycle are to be expected. Older adulthood is no different.

Many adults experience co-occurring chronic medical conditions, including cognitive issues, COPD, macular degeneration, dia-

betes, and others that tend to increase with age and can exacerbate or even result in mental health challenges. Oftentimes, older adults are concerned that they may lose their independence and end up living in a nursing facility. In later life, many have experienced the loss of friends, family, or perhaps a spouse or partner. Sometimes, unexpected stresses take place after an individual retires. Retirement requires a transition into new activities, and without preparation, an older person might find life less

interesting or may have fewer social connections than when working. In addition, many of today's older adults are raising their grandchildren for a number of reasons, and the dynamics between them and their own children can be complex. These challenges may lead to substance misuse, which can be further exacerbated by possible negative interactions with medications. In some cases, adult children may find themselves caring for their aging parents with chronic mental health conditions, and that brings its own set

of unique challenges. Many older adults have lived through one or both World Wars, the Korean War, Vietnam, the social changes of the 1960s and

for some, even the Great Depression. All continue to live in fast-changing times seeing advances that may

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have seemed unimaginable when they were younger. They have given much to their community and many have devoted their lives to caring for others in multiple ways. Now is the time when we, as representatives of the community, can give back and assist older adults in ways they themselves determine and are willing to accept, always respecting them as valuable and unique individuals.

Greater Nashua Mental Health Center offers an array of mental health services that are specifically geared toward the older adult. Our agency employs a specialized team that includes a psychiatrist, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, counselors, health mentors, case managers, and vocational and benefit experts. We are skilled at helping clients and their

families find resources and develop skills to maintain their independence, with the often stated goal of staying out of assisted living or a nursing facility. The clinicians of our Older Adult Services programs are experienced and informed about loss, medication interactions, substance misuse, the stresses of retirement, grandparents raising grandchildren, and the dynamics of adult children of parents with chronic mental health problems caring for those parents as they age. Our staff are experts at applying for the Choices for Independence Medicaid waiver program, which brings skilled in-home care to clients with limited resources. We collaborate with the assisted living and independent housing options in this and other nearby communities, should that be a choice of our clients, and can assist those with higher incomes and assets to find the most suitable housing as well.

Greater Nashua Mental Health Center offers the REAP (Referral, Education, Assistance and Prevention) program, which is free, confidential and provides home visits to 11 surrounding towns to help older adults remain independent, even if they are not our clients. We host the Older Adult Wrap-around Meeting, held monthly in our boardroom at 100 W. Pearl St., where resources and challenges are shared among housing managers, hospitals, Nashua Police Senior Relations, City Hall, Welfare, Public Health, emergency responders, Meals on Wheels, Adult Protective Services, Gateways, the Southern NH Services CAP program, Choices for Independence case managers, visiting nurse providers, the Rivier University RISE program, and many others. We share our expertise through presentations at the Senior Center and other housing complexes about ways to best address neighbor

conflict and mental health community services in general, to inform older adults about what our agency can offer and how we can be of assistance. All Greater Nashua Mental Health Center's Older Adult Services providers are devoted to their work with this unique population.

We offer a wide array of behavioral health programs, including treatment for substance use disorders, and for individuals challenged with both mental health and substance misuse simultaneously. Our services are available for those of all ages, from children to older adults, and no one is ever turned away due to the inability to pay. In addition, we are the statewide providers of behavioral health services for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Don't go it alone. We're here to help. Contact Greater Nashua Mental Health Center today. For an appointment, call our intake line at 603-402-1574.

For general information, call our main number at 603-889-6147. Our video-phone number is 603-821-0073. To speak to someone 24 hours a day, 7 days a

week if you are in crisis, call 1-800-762-8191.

Patricia Butler, LICSW, is program manager, older adult services for the Greater Nashua Mental Health Center.



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at Community Council

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