Facts and Figures about Older People’s Mental Health

Older people experience mental health problems including depression, anxiety, delirium (acute confusion), schizophrenia, eating disorders, psychosis and bi-polar disorders and yet levels of awareness and understanding about them remains low.

Common experiences and trends

Depression and anxiety are among the most common mental health problems in later life.

- 1 in 4 people aged over 65 live with depression and 40% of people aged 85 or over live with debilitating depression that affects their ability to engage in daily activities.
- For every 100 people with depression, only 50 seek treatment and only 25 are diagnosed.
- As few as 6% of older people with depression are referred to mental health services, compared to 50% of those under 65. Less than 2% are referred for primary care psychological therapy.
- There is no one single cause for depression in later life; it results from many factors including family/life history, bereavement and grief, physical ill health, and/or, coming to terms with a particular phase in later life.

- Excessive use of alcohol is a risk factor for depression but alcohol abuse amongst older people is more likely to be overlooked and less likely to be taken seriously.
- 20% people aged 65 and over develop psychotic symptoms by the time they are 85, which are not a precursor to dementia but often mistaken for dementia.
- Depression in later life is strongly linked to physical ill health and disability, yet as few as 10-12 % of older people living
with two or more long-term conditions are treated for depression.

- People aged 65 and over have the highest suicide rate for women and second highest for men.

- There are approximately 70,000 older people with schizophrenia in the UK. Early intervention in treating symptoms of late onset schizophrenia can be effective.

- There has been an increase in the number of older people with eating disorders (anorexia and bulimia). Among the key stress factors are redundancy and relationship breakdown.

**Getting the right help and support**

Talking openly about mental health can help older people understand their own experiences, and in getting the right help and support quickly, for example

- Peer support that helps to reduce the stigma and isolation that many older people with mental health problems experience;
- Responsive and personalised services;
- Welcoming and inclusive neighbourhoods and communities where older people with mental health problems have a role;
- Psychological therapies that provide insight and strategies for coping with mental health problems.

**What works?**

- Having a voice and choice and control over care, treatment and support so that older people with mental health problems can continue to live well.

- Keeping a focus on recovery irrespective of illnesses, or, recurring symptoms can help older people to discover, or, rediscover a positive sense of identity.

**What Next?**

The Older Leaders for Change programme is a 3-year programme designed to raise the profile of older people’s mental health and
wellbeing. Led by older people with diverse experiences of mental health issues, the project will:

- Increase awareness and understanding about mental health amongst older people and their families;
- Influence local service developments and delivery in two areas in England – London and Leicestershire
- Agree local priorities for change including tackling stigma and stereotypes about age, older people and mental health

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