



# Integrated Health Care for an Aging Population

## A Fact Sheet for Graduate Psychology Faculty and Training Directors

### Why Do Older Adults Need Integrated Health Care?

- ♦ Our current health care system is fragmented and confusing. It puts older adults who have physical/cognitive comorbidities and use multiple medications at particular disadvantage.
- ♦ Older adults are the most varied age group. Such diversity, along with a fragmented system of care, can lead to marginalization, especially of those who are poor, minority, frail, disabled, or seriously mentally ill.
- ♦ The individual needs of older adults are often not taken into account, perpetuating a health care system that is insensitive to the need for integrated care.
- ♦ It is estimated that up to two thirds of older adults with a mental health problem do not receive the services they need. The number of older adults with mental disorders is expected to quadruple—from 4 million in 1970 to 15 million in 2030.
- ♦ Coordinated care in which psychologists are integrated with other health professionals enhances access to mental health services, improves quality of care, and lowers overall health care expenditures. Outcome studies now confirm this fact.

### What Are the Barriers to Providing Mental and Behavioral Health Care to Older Adults?

- ♦ A fragmented delivery system, a shortage of geriatric mental health providers, and the stigmatization of mental health care lie at the heart of poor care for older adults
- ♦ There is a lack of preventive and early identification strategies for geriatric mental health disorders, a low rate of referral to mental health care by general practitioners, and a mismatch between services offered and those preferred by older adults (e.g., psychotherapy).
- ♦ Health care professionals are not immune to stereotypes of aging. Viewing all older adults as poor, lonely, depressed, sick, dependent, rigid, and unable to cope can have a negative effect on the treatment process.
- ♦ Ageism can engender a feeling of hopelessness in health care providers, render inadequate assessment of treatable problems, and promote self-fulfilling expectations of poor progress and treatments that result in poor quality care.

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Developed by the American Psychological Association Committee on Aging in collaboration with the APA Presidential Task Force on Integrated Health Care for an Aging Population (IHAP).

Read the *Blueprint for Change: Integrated Health Care for an Aging Population*: [www.apa.org/pi/aging/blueprint.html](http://www.apa.org/pi/aging/blueprint.html)

For more information, contact the APA Office on Aging, 202-336-6135, or [ddigilio@apa.org](mailto:ddigilio@apa.org).



### How Does Integrated Health Care Address These Issues?

- ♦ It allows the sharing of information among team members and the establishment of a comprehensive treatment plan to address the biopsychosocial needs of patients.
- ♦ It is one antidote to ageism and is sensitive to the issues of multicultural diversity and marginalization.
- ♦ It encourages shared decision making, honoring older adult preferences and values.
- ♦ It promotes the delivery of person-centered, culturally competent care to empower patients and family members to receive optimal health care.
- ♦ It can occur in a variety of settings frequented by older adults, including primary care, rehabilitation, specialty, long-term care, and community-based care sites.
- ♦ It is especially effective in reducing depressive symptoms in older adults.
- ♦ Research indicates that older adults are more likely to accept and receive mental health treatment if it is part of a package of health services provided at one site.

### Role of Psychologists on Integrated Health Care Teams

- ♦ Psychologists provide essential contributions to the integrated health care team in geriatric settings:
  - performing cognitive and psychological evaluations that differentiate normal aging from pathology
  - assessing suicide risk, evaluating acute changes in cognitive status, and documenting psychotic symptoms
  - treating behavioral health problems such as mood and anxiety disorders, insomnia, and incontinence
  - coordinating family meetings
  - conducting health services program evaluation and outcomes research
- ♦ As experts in systems theory and communications, psychologists play a key role in fostering the development of teamwork and collaborative relationships among professionals and promoting productive communication regarding conflicting views during meetings with staff, patients, and their families.

### What Can I Do?

- ♦ Incorporate *Blueprint for Change: Integrated Health Care for an Aging Population* into your curricula and training materials.
- ♦ Prepare your students for work in integrated health care settings rather than in more isolated practice settings. This would include training in the art and science of interdisciplinary team building and sparking an awareness of the specific training, core roles, and professional models of other health care team professionals.
- ♦ Promote clinical training opportunities in integrated health care settings at all levels of training to prepare psychologists for work in integrated health care teams.
- ♦ Educate interdisciplinary colleagues on the unique expertise of psychologists as team members.
- ♦ Collaborate with these colleagues to provide educational opportunities that reinforce the importance and value of integrated health care across disciplines.
- ♦ Encourage other psychologists in all settings (e.g., clinical, research, academic, policy) to advocate for practices and policies that support integrated health care for older adults at local, state, and national levels.