



Administration for Community Living - Opioids and Older Adults

About the Administration for Community Living (ACL)

The mission of the ACL is to maximize the independence, well-being, and health of older adults, people with disabilities across the lifespan, and their families and caregivers.

ACL's role in addressing the opioid crisis includes:

- Reaching people impacted by these conditions in the community (i.e., older adults, caregivers, grandparents raising grandchildren)
- Offering resources to professionals and volunteers touching the lives of older people and caregivers
- Aligning partnerships with CMS, SAMHSA, and other federal agencies to address this issue

["The Opioid Public Health Emergency and Older Adults"](#) is an ACL-authored issue brief. It explains how the opioid crisis is affecting older adults and what stakeholders might be able to do to address it.

Opioids & Older Adults - Data

- Older adults are among the groups affected by the opioid public health emergency because they often use prescription opioids to cope with painful chronic conditions, like arthritis, or procedures, such as surgery.

Like anyone else, if older adults use prescription opioids for a long time, they risk developing an opioid use disorder (OUD) (Dowell et al., 2016).

- Opioids have a stronger impact on older adults because bodily processes slow as people age. Older

adults also tend to be using multiple medications, which can interact with opioids and cause serious side effects. Complicating this situation is that older adults with a substance use disorder, such as an OUD, may have symptoms similar to those of depression, delirium or dementia (Maree et al., 2016).

- Prescription opioids are more readily available and more often used in older adults than in younger adults (Frenk, Porter, & Paulozzi, 2015).

We saw an almost 9-fold increase in opioid prescriptions in office-based medical visits by older adults between 1995 and 2010 (Olfson, et al., 2013).

- Medicare beneficiaries (aged and disabled) have among the highest and fastest-growing rates of diagnosed OUD at more than 6 of every 1,000 beneficiaries (CMS, 2017).
- Other consequences of OUD may include elder abuse and grandparents raising grandchildren whose parents have OUD or died as a result of OUD (ACL, 2018).

Local Resources

The [Eldercare Locator](http://www.eldercare.gov) (www.eldercare.gov or 800.677.1116) is a nationwide service that connects older adults and their caregivers with trustworthy local support resources.

Contact them on-line or via phone to find a local agency that can explain what resources may be available for older adults, including caregivers and grandparents raising grandchildren, in any location in the country.



Prevention & Evidence-Based Resources

There are evidence-based practices and programs designed to help older adults manage their physical and behavioral health. Practices include [Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment \(SBIRT\)](#), which is used to identify, reduce, and prevent problematic use, abuse, and dependence on alcohol and illicit drugs and the [Chronic Pain Self-Management Program](#), which provides information and teaches practical skills for managing the challenges of living with chronic pain – a portion of this program explores strategies for management of medications, including opioids.

Program availability varies. Contact the [Eldercare Locator](#) (800.677.1116) to find local programs that serve older adults, to get more information about community-based resources, and for various tip sheets, such as [Older Adults and Medication Safety](#).

Elder Abuse & Adult Protective Services Resources

At the Elder Justice Coordinating Council meeting held June 5, 2018, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, Alex Azar stated:

"We know that some older adults abuse opioids themselves and that many others also experience abuse, neglect, and exploitation by others as a result of opioid addiction."

Across HHS, we're looking at approaches to help communities across our country that are suffering from addiction, including ways to support (Adult Protective Services) as they develop effective ways to prevent, detect and remediate the harm caused by opioid abuse."

Adult Protective Services (APS) programs are provided by state and local governments serving older adults and adults with disabilities who need assistance because of abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or financial exploitation (adult maltreatment). In all states, APS programs are charged with receiving and responding to reports of adult

maltreatment and working closely with clients and a wide variety of allied professionals to maximize client safety and independence.

Contact the [National Center on Elder Abuse](#) for a directory listing of state-by-state reporting contacts and other information.

Other Resources

- ["Summary of ACL Stakeholder Discussion: Opioid Public Health Emergency"](#) highlights themes from a discussion on opioids and the impact on older adults and people with disabilities, including areas where more information is needed and how Aging and Disability Networks may be involved with providing supports to address the opioid epidemic.
- ["Summary of Responses from a Request for Information \(RFI\): People with Disabilities and Opioid Use Disorder \(OUD\)"](#) is issued by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) at ACL. The RFI yielded comments from 50 respondents, including consumers, community and national organizations, research teams, and federal partners resulting in a [funding opportunity](#) to conduct research on OUD among people with disabilities.
- To subscribe to ACL email updates: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USACL/subscriber/new>

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