

Substance Use Prevention Services for Older Adults

Published on April 29, 2023



Central East (HHS Region 3)

PTTC

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

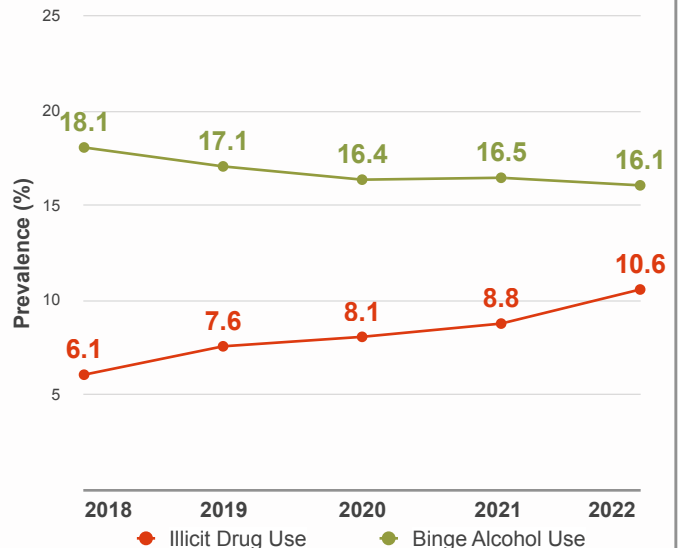
More than 13.6 million adults over the age of 50 met the criteria for a substance use disorder in 2022.¹ This number will likely rise as the adult population over 50 is projected to increase by 21 million by 2040.² Yet substance use among this population remains underrecognized and has historically not been a priority population for many prevention professionals. Prevention professionals should be aware of these factors and opportunities to identify and address them.

FACTS ABOUT SUBSTANCE MISUSE AMONG OLDER ADULTS (50+)^{3,4}

Nationally, from 2018 to 2022:

1. Annual **fatal drug-involved overdoses** increased from 23,401 to 39,384
2. **Cannabis use** increased by 87%
3. Annual **alcohol-induced deaths** increased by about 30%
4. **Tobacco use** declined by over 20% among ages 12-49, but saw no change among older adults⁶

PAST MONTH SUBSTANCE USE AMONG OLDER ADULTS (50+)⁵



RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS AMONG OLDER ADULTS^{7,8,9}

Transitioning into older adulthood comes with major life changes that can present new or unique risk and protective factors. Factors associated with older adult substance use include:

Risk Factors

- Chronic pain or illness
- Physical disabilities
- Reduced mobility
- Cognitive decline
- Living situation transitions
- Loss of loved ones
- Involuntary retirement
- Living on a reduced income
- Social isolation
- Taking multiple prescriptions

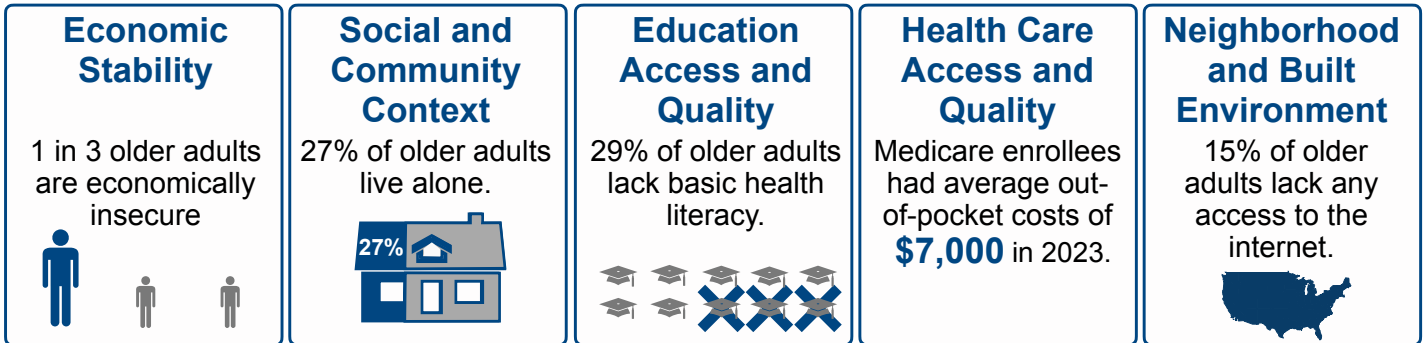
Protective Factors

- ★ Community involvement
- ★ Social connections
- ★ Positive self-image
- ★ Having a purpose
- ★ Remaining productive
- ★ Resiliency
- ★ Voluntary retirement
- ★ Comprehensive medical care
- ★ Ability to live independently
- ★ Access to resources (e.g., housing, income)



THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH AND OLDER ADULTS

The [social determinants of health](#) (SDOH) have a major impact on the health and well-being of older adults, and SDOH inequities can increase the risks or effects of substance use.^{10,11,12,13,14}



THE IMPORTANCE OF SCREENING

Substance use among older adults is less readily detected than in younger populations. Regular screenings are vital for identifying those who may benefit from a referral to services, as well as to learn more about substance use prevalence. Screenings can be combined with brief prevention interventions. Health care providers, retirement communities, state and local departments of aging, and others are potential screening partners. The [Florida Brief Intervention and Treatment for Elders \(BRITE\) Project](#) is an example of a screening and brief intervention tool adapted for use among older adults. Evaluations found it successful in identifying older adults at risk for substance use and reducing use by 6-month follow-up.¹⁵

NOTES

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