



OLDER OHIOANS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NETWORK

The older adult population in Ohio is growing by leaps and bounds, mirroring the nation. With the first of the baby boomers beginning to turn 60 in 2006, Ohio is gaining 12,000 new senior citizens each month. The mission of the Ohio Department of Aging addresses this population by “improving the quality of life for older Ohioans, helping senior citizens live active, healthy and independent lives.” In an era of dwindling resources and increasing regulations and mandates, no one human service system acting alone can address the myriad issues involved in meeting the behavioral health (alcohol, drug and mental health) needs of older adults. Quality of life is much more than physical health, mental health, emotional or spiritual well-being; it is a combination. By acting in partnership, Ohio’s human service systems can improve the quality of life for older Ohioans through prevention and treatment of mental illness, medication misuse and substance abuse.

The Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities, with funding from the Ohio Departments of Mental Health, Aging and Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, organized an Older Ohioans Behavioral Health Policy Institute. The purpose of the Institute was to draw attention to the issues and to harness the expertise and commitment of the attendees. The attendees helped to shape priorities and set direction for the Older Ohioans Behavioral Health Network.

Key stakeholders invited to participate in the Older Ohioans Behavioral Health Policy Institute included: state departments, statewide associations, county Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Boards, Area Agencies on Aging, consumers and families, researchers, older adult and behavioral health service providers and other interested organizations and individuals.

Teams of participants identified successes and barriers at the local and state levels to consumer access, funding systems issues and workforce development. Then they were charged with making recommendations for Ohio on priorities to address the alcohol, drug addiction and mental health needs in light of the coming elder boom. Consensus was reached on ten priorities. These priorities are being used to frame the interdisciplinary work in Ohio through the Older Ohioans Behavioral Health Network and its partners. The mission of the Network is to be Ohio’s statewide coordinating hub on older adults’ mental health and substance abuse issues and informational needs. The Network coordinates and provides leadership on implementation of the priorities set at the Policy Institute.

Over the last year, in partnership with the Ohio Departments of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, Mental Health, Aging and others, the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities has spearheaded Ohio’s effort to tackle the issues related to older adults’ behavioral health. In April 2007, participants were reconvened at Policy Institute II to focus on progress made and the vision of new Administration leadership. Additional input from the multiple systems interacting with older adults was helped to reshape Ohio’s direction to better meet the needs of its older population, but it was recognized that the original priorities should serve as an ongoing roadmap.