

Recommendations from the Governor's Commission on Successful Aging:

In older persons, substance misuse occurs in two prevalent forms: mixing alcohol with drugs such as opioid pain medicines and anti-anxiety medications, both of which are commonly prescribed for older persons; and over-use of alcohol related to the common lack of awareness that smaller amounts of alcohol have greater effects on aging bodies.

State support of the five Area Agencies on Aging for outreach mental health services to people age 60 and older in partnership with designated mental health agencies (DAs) is essential and should be expanded to meet need.

Substance misuse by older people affects work, health, mental health, and relationships.

Screening tools for substance use as well as for cognitive impairment and depression are available yet underutilized in the health care system.

The nature of the substance abuse problem among people age 65 and older is more a problem of misuse. Many older persons misuse medications in different ways such as: taking a medicine that was prescribed for someone else; taking a larger dose than prescribed; use with alcohol; skipping or hoarding drugs; taking medicine in different ways than prescribed.

Twenty-five percent (25%) of older adults consume a larger quantity of alcohol than recommended by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and SAMHSA, or drink alcohol while taking psychoactive medications; the majority does not meet criteria for a substance use disorder.

Vermont ranks 43rd worst amongst states in chronic drinking by seniors, according to a 2014 report by the United Health Foundation.

Recommendations:

☐ Develop and implement substance misuse prevention strategies targeting older persons.

☐ Create guidelines for screening and treatment of older adults by primary care and by substance abuse treatment providers.

☐ Recommend providers use evidence-based tools for screening and follow-up treatment for older adults with identified substance use or abuse problems Examples of tools are:

- SBIRT (Screening Brief Intervention and Referral for Treatment)

<http://sbirt.vermont.gov/what-is-sbirt/>

- S-MAST-G <http://sbirt.vermont.gov/screening-forms/older-adult-alcohol-screening-instrument/> and

- DAST-10 screening tools <http://sbirt.vermont.gov/screening-forms/dast/>