

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Ensuring Access to Psychiatric Services for Older Adults

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Issue:

The older adult population is rising in the United States, and the proportion of older adults with psychiatric, neurocognitive, and substance use disorders is also expected to increase.¹ However, significant barriers continue to limit access to psychiatric care for this population.² These barriers include a shortage of geriatric psychiatry specialists, ageism among healthcare providers and in broader society, and low willingness of psychiatrists to accept Medicare due to lower reimbursement rates. They also include declining physical and cognitive health, which complicates care; frequent exclusion from mental health research; and social and structural barriers such as rural residency, lack of transportation, and difficulties using telepsychiatry services. It is important to ensure access to psychiatric care for older adults to improve their adherence to psychiatric treatment, overall well-being, quality of life, ability to function, and late-life satisfaction.

APA Position:

It is the position of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) that ensuring equitable access to high-quality, evidence-based psychiatric care in a timely manner for older adults is a matter of human dignity and justice in health. The APA supports the following initiatives to improve access to psychiatric care for older adults: strengthening the geriatric psychiatry workforce, improving reimbursement for psychiatric treatment, inclusion of older adults in mental health research, and mitigation of social factors causing barriers to psychiatric care such as transportation needs and the use of telepsychiatry platforms tailored to older adults.

Authors: Council on Geriatric Psychiatry

References:

1. Eden J, Katie Maslow K, Le M, and Blazer D. eds., Committee on the Mental Health Workforce for Geriatric Populations Board on Health Care Services. The Mental Health and Substance Use Workforce for Older Adults: In Whose Hands? Washington DC: National Academies Press:2012.

2. Ratnakaran B, Trinh N, Ahmed I. North America. In: Bhugra D, Trinh N, Ahmed I (eds.). *Mental Health in Older People Across Cultures*: United Kingdom: Oxford University Press; 2025. p.175-192.