FACT SHEET: OLDER ADULTS AND MENTAL HEALTH

At least 5.6 million to 8 million older adults – nearly 1 in 5 - have one or more mental health or substance use conditions which present unique challenges for their care.3

Fewer than 40% of older adults with mental &/or substance use disorders get treatment. Of those who receive treatment, most go to primary care physicians, who provide minimally adequate care less than 15% of the time. 4

Untreated mental and substance use disorders among older adults exacerbate health conditions, decrease life expectancy, and increase overall healthcare costs.5,6,7

Mental disorders, particularly depression and anxiety, are major contributors to—and are exacerbated by—social isolation, which results in diminished quality of life, further barriers to intervention and premature institutionalization.8

Older adults have one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, completing suicide nearly 30% more than the general population. White males 85 and over complete suicide at nearly 4 times the rate of the general population. 9

Depression, one of the conditions most commonly associated with suicide in older adults, is a widely under-recognized and undertreated medical illness.10

Many older adults who die by suicide—up to 75 percent—visited a physician within a month before death.11

Untreated mental disorders among both older adults with physical disabilities and family caregivers are a major cause of avoidable placements in institutional settings.12,13,14

Treatment works. There are effective, evidence-based interventions that can improve the quality of life of older adults with mental and substance use disorders.