

Mental health considerations for older adults and individuals receiving care in facility-based settings during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The information below has been selected to support providers with patients in facility-based care settings who may be experiencing increased symptoms of anxiety, depression and suicidality, particularly due to circumstances related to COVID-19 precautions.

General health guidance

Older adults and people with severe underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness. Read more about the NIH updates on the virus and federal response: [nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus](https://www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus)

The CDC has issued guidance on how to best protect older adults during the pandemic, including recommendations to stay home, wash hands frequently and maintain a physical distance of six feet or more from others in public spaces: [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html)

Emotional impact on older adults

The outbreak of COVID-19 may be emotionally stressful for older adults. Stressors for older adults during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Physical health, pain and disability.
- Social isolation, feeling lonely or disconnected. This may be increased for those in skilled nursing facilities and/or long-term care homes.
- Disruption in routine, including changes in daily life, inability to connect with family and difficulty with grocery shopping.
- Losses.
- Mental health conditions.

Signs of stress anxiety, depression or suicidality in older adults may include:

- Increased fear and worry about their health and the health of their loved ones.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Worsening of mental health conditions.
- Self-isolating.

How can you help?

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has issued tips for caregivers, health care workers and loved ones to support elders during the pandemic:

- Empathize and validate worries.
- Support connections with loved ones.
- Protect yourself and others from illness.
- Encourage engagement in old/new activities.
- Know your local resources and supports.
- Consider administering a validated suicide risk assessment.
- Familiarize yourself with your organization's workflow for suspected depression, anxiety or other mental health concerns.

Local mental health resources for older adults:

- **Oregon Psychiatric Access Line** | ohsu.edu/school-of-medicine/child-and-adolescent-psychiatry/oregon-psychiatric-access-line

Free, same-day psychiatric consultation service for clinical teams through a call center operated Monday-Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The toll-free number is 855-966-7255.

- **Senior Loneliness Line** | seniorlonelinessline.org/

A free, confidential warmline staffed 24/7 for Oregonians aged 55 and older who are experiencing loneliness, isolation, depression or anxiety. The statewide number is 503-200-1633.

Validated suicide risk screening tools:

Tool	Link	Description
Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9)	integration.samhsa.gov/images/res/PHQ%20-%20Questions.pdf	A nine-item self-report inventory to flag symptoms of depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts across adult populations.
Patient Safety Screener-3 (PSS-3)	sprc.org/microlearning/patientsafetyscreener	A three-item questionnaire validated for administration in emergency departments by all staff, for all adult populations.
Cornell Scale for Depression in Dementia (CSDD)	caltcm.org/assets/documents/forms/cornell%20scale%20for%20depression%20in%20dementia.pdf	Caregiver observations of a patient's behavior indicating depression and suicidal thoughts. Designed for use with older adults with moderate to severe dementia.
Columbia Suicide Severity Scale (C-SSRS)	cssrs.columbia.edu	An extensive, two-page questionnaire intended for use by multi-disciplinary staff across education levels to inventory current and past suicidality and predictive risk factors. Endorsed by CDC, NIH, FDA, SAMHSA.

National mental health resources for older adults

Suicide prevention:

- [Issue Brief 4: Preventing Suicide in Older Adults](#)
Source: National Council on Aging (NCOA)
Description: List of risk factors for completed suicide and prevention strategies to be taken by aging services workers, behavioral health providers and primary care providers.
- [Promoting Emotional Health and Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for Senior Centers](#)
Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Description: Guide to early warning signs and early intervention of suicidal ideation in community senior centers.

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- [Promoting Emotional Health and Preventing Suicide: A Toolkit for Senior Living Communities](#)
Source: SAMHSA
Description: Guide to prevention and early intervention of suicidal ideation across the continuum of senior living communities.
- [Weaving a Community Safety Net to Prevent Older Adult Suicide](#)
Source: NASMHPD
Description: Comprehensive article of best practices for elder-specific suicide risk assessment and prevention across healthcare and community settings.