

## **OKLAHOMA MENTAL HEALTH AND AGING COALITION PROVIDES ADVOCACY AND ANSWERS**

More than one in four Americans over age 60 will experience a clinically significant change in their thinking or emotions. Many of these seniors are diagnosed with conditions such as depression, dementia, or anxiety for the first time as they age. Every year approximately 500 Oklahoma seniors will commit suicide; many others will misuse or abuse alcohol, illicit drugs or prescription medications.

The Oklahoma Mental Health and Aging Coalition is an alliance formed in 1991 to improve the availability, accessibility, and quality of mental health and substance abuse services for the more than 456,000 Oklahomans who are 65 or older. Individuals as well as representatives from a diverse group of public and private organizations form the Coalition, which meets monthly.

The Coalition seeks to increase public awareness of the mental health needs of seniors. Mental health changes in individuals over the age of 60 are often linked to physical disorders such as heart attack and stroke. These changes may also be associated with a myriad of other factors including metabolic changes, medication interactions, infection, personal losses, and situational changes.

The Coalition compiles current information regarding mental health and substance abuse issues facing older Oklahomans and serves as a resource to public policy makers as well as consumers and other concerned citizens.

This advocacy group addresses the issue of mental health and wellness, prevention, treatment and recovery, all of which significantly impacts the quality of life of older Oklahomans as well as their interaction with friends, families and communities. The Coalition's purpose is to improve the availability and quality of mental health services to older Oklahomans and their families through education, research and increased public awareness.

The Coalition continually advocates for the funding and development of resources to support the mental health needs of Oklahoma seniors and their caregivers. The Coalition is a member of the National Coalition on Mental Health and Aging, and has been instrumental in assisting other states in developing similar Coalitions.

The Oklahoma Mental Health and Aging Coalition invites your participation and offers the opportunity for education and advocacy. Visit the website at [www.omhac.org](http://www.omhac.org). For more information about the Coalition or the mental health and substance abuse issues facing older Oklahomans, contact [info@omhac.org](mailto:info@omhac.org).

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