



ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN RURAL AMERICA:

A CRISIS IN THE MAKING FOR SENIORS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

A Capitol Hill Briefing Sponsored by the:

AMERICAN MENTAL HEALTH

COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION (AMHCA)

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The only organization working exclusively for the clinical mental health counseling profession.

Introductory Remarks by:

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American Mental Health Counselors Association



Who is AMHCA?

- The American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) is the leading national organization for licensed clinical mental health counselors (MHC's).
- We represent nearly 7,000 MHC's around the country. Our headquarters is located in Alexandria, VA.
- We have a 10 member Board of Directors and we have several committees that provide recommendations to the Board on such as advocacy, membership, clinical standards and finance.
- AMHCA strives to be the go-to organization for licensed clinical mental health counselors for advocacy, education, leadership, and collaboration.
- Our organization provides the backbone of resources needed for clinical mental health counselors to thrive in today's world.

The Role of Mental Health Counselors in Rural Areas

- There are over 120,000 mental health counselors (MHCs) active in the U.S. in 2013 (HRSA, 2015). Another 26,000 are expected to be in the workforce by 2025 (HRSA, 2015).
- With the aging of the population and the expected increase in demand of mental health services by people over the age of 65, the clinical mental health counseling profession is armed and ready to address the access needs of older adults with mental health disorders in underserved areas – including many rural areas.
- MHCs are primary mental health providers (PMHPs) who offer high-quality, comprehensive, integrative, cost-effective services across the lifespan.
- MHC's are trained to provide mental health assessment, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.
- MHC's promote wellness through early intervention. Untreated mental illness adds billions of dollars to public insurance programs downstream.

Medicare Program and Mental Health Facts

- Medicare is the largest health care program in the country, covering over 49 million Americans.
- The elderly and disabled in the Medicare program are often at the highest risk for mental health (MH) problems such as depression and suicide.
- Many Medicare beneficiaries do not have access to a MH professional because of their remote locations and the shortage of mental health providers.
- Medicare presently recognizes psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers and psychiatric nurses to provide covered MH services.
- **Mental health counselors (MHC's) and MFTs have equivalent education and training to clinical social workers, but are not eligible to serve Medicare beneficiaries. Recognition of MHC's & MFTs would increase the pool of eligible MH professionals in the Medicare program by over 200,000 licensed practitioners.**

Why Older Adult Mental Health Matters

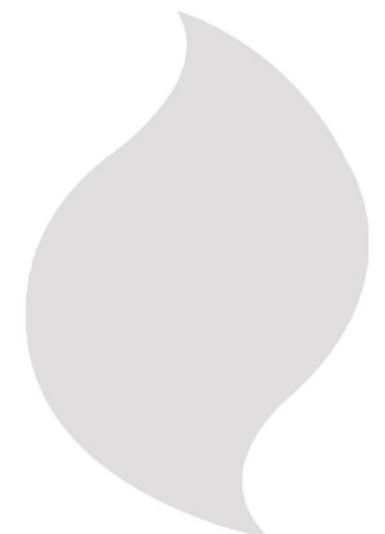
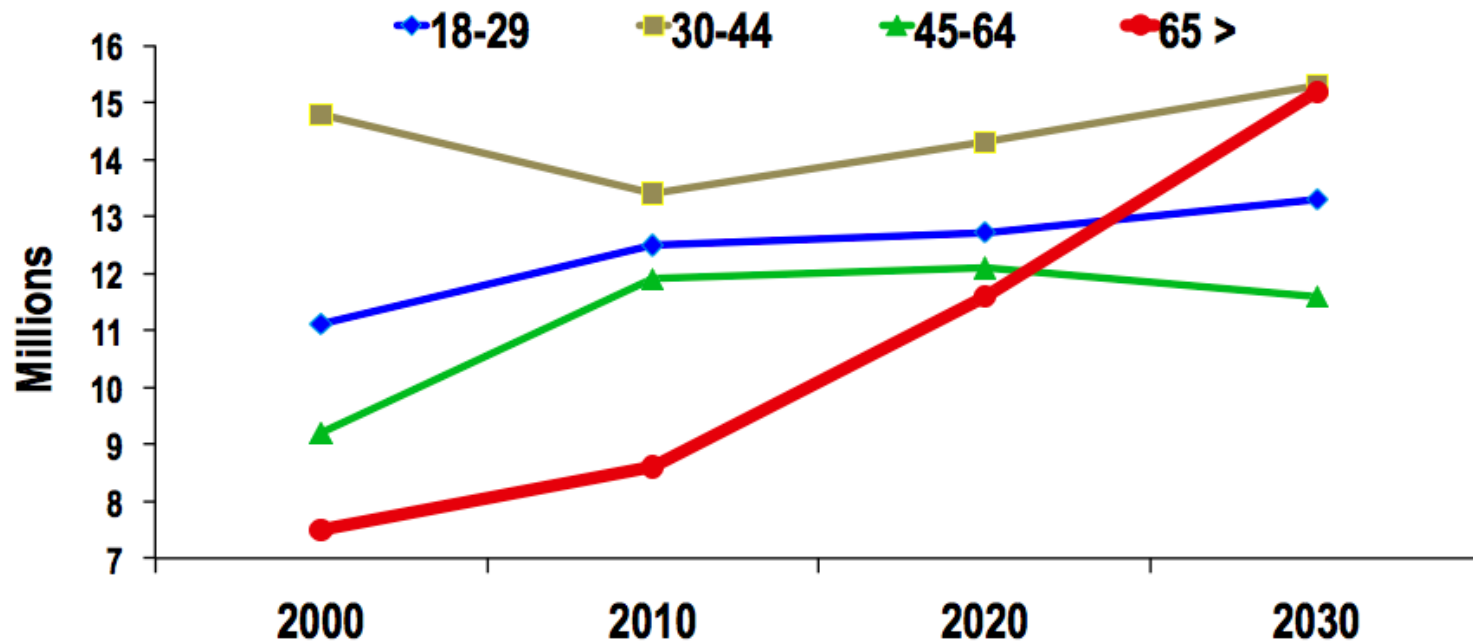
- MH/SU disorders are major impediments to living well in old age. They cause considerable personal suffering and make it difficult for older people to achieve their potential in old age. This is a population in critical need of education, targeted prevention and early intervention.
- MH disorders for seniors, 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.
- Older adults with MH disorders have greater disability than those with physical conditions alone, as well as poorer health outcomes and higher rates of hospitalization and ED visits.



Mental Health and Aging: The Impending Silver Tsunami

- The population of older adults in the U.S. will nearly double over the next 20 years.
- More importantly, adults 65 and older will increase from 13 percent to 20 percent of the population, roughly equal to the population of children under age 18.
- If the prevalence of mental health disorders among older adults remains unchanged, over the next 20 years the number of older adults with mental health and/or substance disorders will nearly double from about 8 million people to about 15 million people.
- The impending “silver tsunami” of behavioral health conditions that older adults will be living with will overwhelm our ability – governments, communities and family caregivers -- to address the mental health and medical needs on older persons.
- **The situation cries out for the appropriate use of the workforce** – namely Medicare provider recognition of clinical mental health counselors (and MFTs).

11 Million Older Americans with Mental Illness Today-15 million in 2030



But it has not always been the case...

- Older Americans (65+) have higher rates of mental illness & suicide than any other demographic and least likely to seek services, with only 1 in 5 receiving needed therapy from a MH professional.
- Older Americans also have the highest rates of mental health related hospitalizations.
- Moreover, mental illness is the most common (35%) qualification for individuals with disabilities—the other Medicare- eligible population.

MHC Medicare Recognition

- The covered mental health professionals recognized by Medicare presently include psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health clinical nurse specialists, and clinical social workers.
- MHC's are not listed as Medicare-covered providers despite the fact that Licensed MHC's have education, training, and practice rights equivalent to or greater than existing covered providers.



Thank You and Questions

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