



KANSAS SILVER HAURED LEGISLATURE

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State-wide Geriatric Mental Health Program House Aging & Long Term Care Committee February 8, 2011

I am Jim Snyder, Speaker of the Kansas Silver Haired Legislature. I am here to present the urgent need for a Kansas Geriatric Mental Health program this year, in total or at least enough to get a practical program started. This is covered in House Bill 2047. We strongly favor this program.

Approximately 20% of community dwelling older individuals experience mental health problems. These include anxiety disorders, mood disorders such as depression, severe cognitive problems (Alzheimer's disease and other dementias). In addition, substance abuse—a significant issue—raises this percentage even higher.

In nursing facilities, the percentage of mental health issues increase from 60 to 80% of the population. Today, the highest rate of suicide is for males age 85 and up, and the 2nd highest rate is among adults age 75 to 84. The 85 & up group's suicides is six times higher than that for the general population.

Older adults do not receive adequate treatment. Many times, present case-workers can identify there is some sort of problem, but due to a number of built-in feelings—the stigma of mental problems....the shame of it all...loss of independence...being viewed as incompetent...and others—these older adults are reluctant to use present help such as mental health centers even if it were possible for them to get there physically. However, if treatment were available in more comfortable and accessible surroundings, chances improve that a more successful outcome would prevail.

The program as urged by the Silver Haired Legislature would insure treatment for this group of people. It would be implemented by the 11 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's) across Kansas. The Kansas Department on Aging would administer and distribute the funds which the AAA's would use for education, outreach, and direct services.

HOUSE AGING & LTC

DATE: 2/8/11

ATTACHMENT # 1

Education on mental health issues, signs, symptoms, treatment options would be provided to professional and direct care staff and service providers...including CNA's home health aides, community service providers, administrators, social workers, nurses, and physicians. This will include mental illness education—it's prevalence among older adults, differences between normal aging & mental illness, and diagnosis, treatment and good mental health maintenance.

Outreach would help target early identification, early intervention and prevention. This would be provided at locations used by older adults and their families such as doctors' offices, senior centers and religious organizations.

Direct Services would be provided by qualified mental health providers including the home, nursing home, community setting, community mental health center, or other mental health providers.

All parties concerned with this proposed program are confident it will provide an array of services that mental health and aging advocates have been working toward for many years. This program will take Kansas a long way in addressing needs of older adults and will position Kansas well for potential funding and programs currently provided at the national level. Programs including the Positive Aging Act, STOP Senior Suicide Act, and other programs through the Administration on Aging.

Thank you.