



PREVENTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES IN OLDER ADULTS: SKILL DEVELOPMENT AMONG CLERGY MEMBERS

The Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER) at Boston University School of Social Work, with support from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Suicide Prevention Program, developed a training program in behavioral health and aging for faith leaders across Massachusetts.

BACKGROUND

- One in five older adults experience behavioral health concerns, with anxiety and depression being the most common.
- Clergy are often the first point of contact when individuals and families face mental health problems or traumatic events.
- With training, faith leaders can increase awareness of behavioral health issues among older adults and make it easier for people to seek help.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

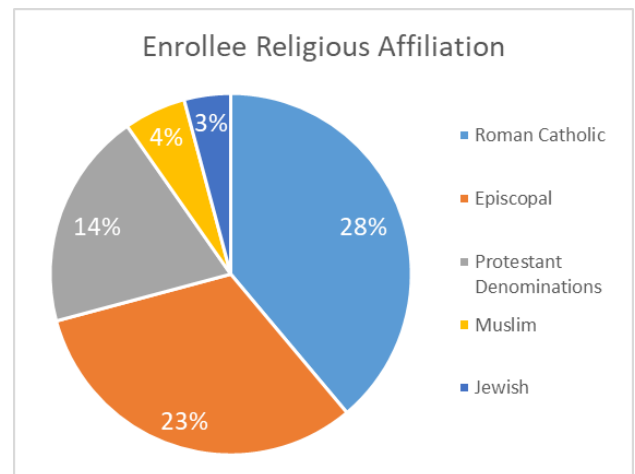
CADER's 19-hour online certificate training program in Behavioral Health in Aging was offered to interested faith leaders across Massachusetts. Courses included:

- Mental Health in Aging
- Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults
- Mental Wellness and Resilience Among Older Immigrants and Refugees
- Substance Use Among Older Adults
- Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias

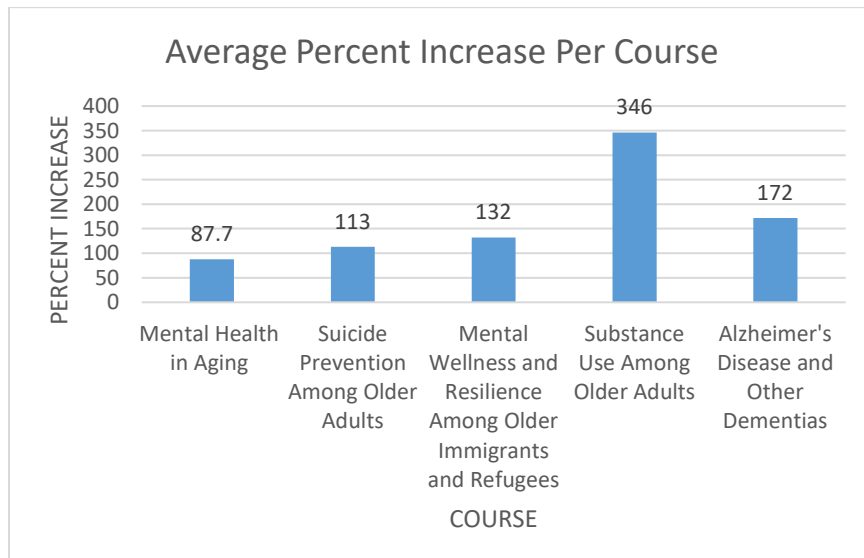
By the end of the training, it was intended that clergy would build the skills and knowledge to recognize the signs and symptoms of common conditions, understand how and where to make referrals for services, and identify strengths and resources.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 48 enrolled
- 40 completed the certificate



RESULTS



Learners rated their skill level at the beginning and end of each course to measure changes in their perceived competence related to the course content.

Clergy learners demonstrated statistically significant increases from pre-course to post-course in the self-assessments of their skill level across all 44 course competencies.



COURSE EVALUATION

93%

Mental Health in Aging

Agreed or strongly agreed that the training expanded their ability **to identify mental health conditions that affect older adults.**

98%

Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults

Agreed or strongly agreed that the training improved their ability **to identify key risk factors associated with suicide among older adults.**

100%

Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias

Agreed or strongly agreed that this course improved their ability **to describe the best ways of communicating with people who have dementia.**

98%

Mental Wellness and Resilience Among Older Immigrants and Refugees

Agreed or strongly agreed that the training enhanced their ability **to identify the stressors and barriers faced by immigrants and refugees.**

95%

Substance Use Among Older Adults

Agreed or strongly agreed that the course will help them **to engage in a collaborative process of addressing substance use with older adults.**

LEARNER FEEDBACK

"With the information and resources I gained in this first course, I feel more confident that I can be of help to my parishioners. Better able to understand signs, symptoms. Better able to listen, encourage and truly support. I particularly like the different 'case studies.'"

Mental Health in Aging

"Every clergy, social worker and those working in substance treatment programs should take this course it has educated me in a great and meaningful way, I am better skilled to help others who are in need of care and education." **Substance Use Among Older Adults**

"This course covered more than I could ever imagine about suicide. It was very inclusive and thorough."

Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults

"I have learned a great deal on the struggles and issues older immigrants face on a daily base, the lack of communication, lack of the knowledge of services available, cultural difference and understanding of the diverse cultures is amazing." **Mental Wellness and Resilience Among Older Immigrants and Refugees**

"The course materials are extremely helpful to me in my ministry setting. I had minimal knowledge in this area before taking the course. Thank you." **Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias**

SUMMARY

- Evaluation data results were extremely positive. Increases in competencies are some of the highest we have ever seen.
- Given the need for this type of training and the positive response, we believe it would be beneficial for faith leaders in other states. This is an important step in fostering collaboration among faith communities, behavioral health, and aging service providers and enhancing behavioral health services to older adults.

To learn more about our projects and course offerings, please contact cader@bu.edu.