

# Upskilling the Senior Center Workforce: A Partnership Between NCOA and Boston University

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AMERICAN SOCIETY ON AGING, ON AGING 2024



School of Social Work:  
Center for Aging & Disability Education & Research



# About Us

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## **Dianne Stone**

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National Council on Aging



## **Annalee Wilson, MPH, CPH**

Evaluation and Workforce Training Manager  
CADER, Boston University School of Social Work

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Director and Assistant Dean  
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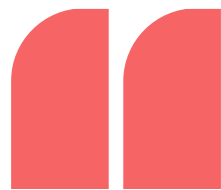
**Center for Aging and Disability  
Education and Research**  
Boston University School of Social Work



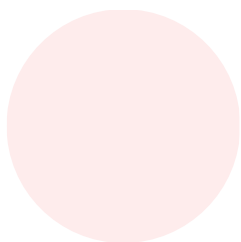
# Learning Objectives

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1. Recognize the changing needs for professional development for senior center professionals
2. Identify and access training opportunities through the NCOA/BU CADER partnership
3. Apply best practices in implementing professional development for senior center staff



**Aging with dignity shouldn't  
be a stroke of luck.**





## Empowering Older Adults

**\$588M**

in public assistance applications submitted

**63,800**

individuals saved \$22.8M on products and services to age well

**42,400**

people participated in chronic disease and falls prevention workshops

**12,500**

older adults received COVID or flu vaccines

**4,500**

older workers trained for jobs

# Fiscal Year 2023 Highlights

2.3 Million Lives Improved



## Strengthening Communities

**\$45M**

awarded to community-based organizations

**25,500**

hours of technical assistance provided to local nonprofits

**35,800**

professionals participated in e-learning

**2,300**

senior centers enrolled as affiliates



## Advocating for Change

**80,200**

more older adults got help from State Health Insurance Assistance Programs due to increased funding

**30,000**

people with Medicare Part D now pay no more than \$35 for insulin thanks to a new price cap

**30,000**

older adults gained access to the Medicare Savings Program based on new eligibility (Maine)

**5,200**

older adults became able to transition from nursing homes back to their homes and communities

**\$125M**

in vaccine outreach funding delivered to the aging network

Our Reach: 4.3M website visitors | 255K social followers

\*Includes both social impact and reach metrics

# NCOA's Role With Senior Centers

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## Leadership



NCOA is the voice of senior centers, trusted by the aging network as the authority on senior centers.

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## NISC – Building the Network



NISC is the largest (and only) national organization dedicated to senior centers.

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## Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center



Building capacity through training, technical assistance, and a clearinghouse of resources, funded by ACL

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## Piloting Innovation



NCOA connects to older adults through the senior center network, delivering innovative programs and connecting to business.



# Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center

## Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center for Professionals

Senior centers nationwide are at a critical juncture and stand to benefit collectively from NCOA's Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center. Browse our clearinghouse of tools and resources to support your programs and services striving to meet the ever-changing needs of our communities.



Ensuring senior centers have the capacity, tools, and resources necessary to develop and implement programs that meet the current and future needs of diverse older adults across the U.S.

[National Institute of Senior Centers](#)



[Programs of Excellence](#)



[Senior Center Spotlights](#)



[Today's Senior Centers](#)





# Senior Centers – Modernizing for 80 Years



Townsend Clubs



Recreation Centers

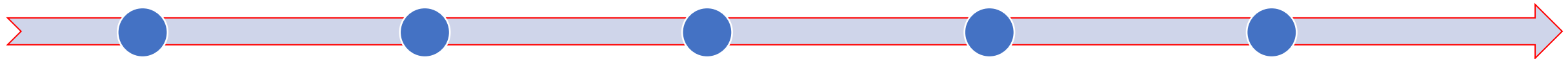


Traditional Senior Center



Multipurpose Senior Centers

Today's Senior Center



# Driving Excellence



## Education & Events

**43** events

**8,076** registrants



## Clearinghouse & Content

**29** programs of excellence  
clearinghouse

**80+** resources shared

**25** senior center spotlights

**115,000** pageviews



## E-Newsletter

**2,000+** subscribers

**28%** click-through rate



## Outreach

**18** presentations/  
conferences



**ncoa**  
national council on aging®

<https://ncoa.org/>

**ncoa** | **Connect**  
national council on aging®

<https://connect.ncoa.org/>

# Resources available on NCOA.org

Senior Centers / National Institute of Senior Centers News

## Senior Center Spotlight for Professionals

Senior centers are vibrant sources of physical and social wellbeing, providing care and essential services to older adults. Read the real-life stories from senior centers on how they make an impact in the lives of their participants and their communities.



[National Senior Center Month](#)



[National Institute of Senior Centers](#)



[Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center](#)



[Center for Healthy Aging](#)



# Resources on NCOA Connect



-  Events ▾
-  Discussion
-  Resources
-  Connect

- [Home](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Signature Activities](#)
- [Communities](#)
- [Tools](#)

A banner for the "Senior Center Summit: Reframing Aging" event. On the left, there is a graphic with colorful geometric shapes and the text "Senior Center Summit: Reframing Aging" in a bold, dark font, with a green "Register now" button below it. On the right, a photograph shows three people in a gym setting; a woman in the foreground is lifting yellow dumbbells, while two other people are visible in the background.

## Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center Home

Welcome to the online community for the Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center! This community is open to all professionals who work in and support senior centers. Participate in our webinars, roundtable networking and other events to build your foundational knowledge and skills, connect with us and with each other on our discussion boards and find resources including innovative programs and strategies. Join our growing network of NISC Affiliate Members - it is free of charge and connects you to thousands of colleagues across the country.

[Join NISC](#)

# Senior Center track



**nc**  
**oe**  
national council  
on aging.

# Age + Action

2024 Conference | Arlington, Virginia: May 6-8



# Elevating Senior Centers

**National Senior Center Month**  
We provide centers with materials to celebrate in September.



**National Institute of Senior Center's Programs of Excellence Clearinghouse**

The National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) Annual Programs of Excellence Awards give senior centers an opportunity to share their innovative programs and the impact they have on the people they serve and their communities. A peer-reviewed competition, winning programs are featured in this clearinghouse on [ncoa.org](http://ncoa.org), celebrated at NCOA's Age+ Action Conference, featured in our Programs of Excellence Webinar Series, and receive a cash prize.

**NCOA** National Institute of Senior Centers  
National Council on Aging



**Visibility**  
Federal officials have had the opportunity to see the value of senior centers first-hand through site visits.

Filter by:  Resources from:

Showing 10 of 29 results for Programs of Excellence

**Vaccine Uptake**  
Through NCOA's initiative with ACL, we awarded contracts to 150 senior centers to vaccinate older adults during the fall 2023 respiratory season.



**Discover Your Senior Center - Caption Video**

National Council on Aging  
13 videos 3,113 views Last updated on Jul 27, 2023

- NCOA: Discover Your Senior Center and Discover Strength**  
National Council on Aging • 199 views • 1 month ago
- NCOA: Discover Your Senior Center and Discover "A Totally Different Life"**  
National Council on Aging • 213 views • 1 month ago
- NCOA: Discover You Senior Center and Discover Encouragement**  
National Council on Aging • 157 views • 1 month ago
- NCOA: Discover Your Senior Center**  
National Council on Aging • 876 views • 1 month ago

Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center  
for Professionals

# The State of Today's Senior Centers: Successes, Challenges, and Opportunities

<https://ncoa.org/article/the-state-of-todays-senior-centers-successes-challenges-and-opportunities>

# State of Senior Centers

## Challenges Facing Senior Centers



Population growth and changing demographics



Ageism and stigma



Need for new leaders



Small and limited funding



Unavailable impact data



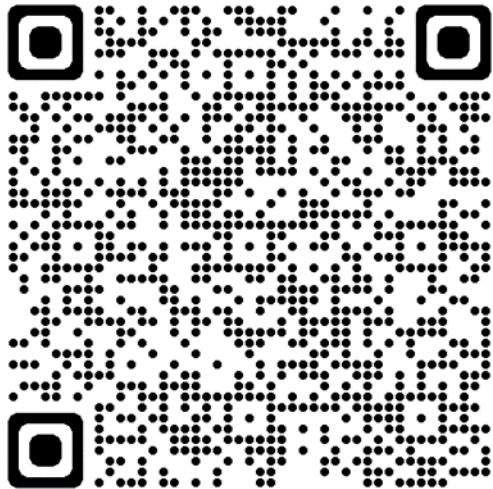
Lack of technology



# Where do we go from here...



NationalInstituteOf  
**SeniorCenters**



## Next steps for NISC and the MSCRC

This environmental scan provides insights that will guide the work of NCOA's development of the Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center and the National Institute of Senior Centers and that they inform the efforts of other stakeholders that improve equitable access to local programs and services. In addition to confirming that the scope of work proposed in the initial MSCRC proposal is aligned with the needs of the senior center network, we are able to begin to identify future steps in our effort to support the senior center network as it improves the lives of older adults.

# Senior Center Month Video



# Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER)

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- Located at the Boston University School of Social Work
- Dedicated to strengthening the workforce that provides health and long-term supports and services to older adults and people with disabilities
- Offers a wide range of online training courses and certificate programs for learners at all levels of experience
  - Competency-focused approach
  - Enhance the skills of practitioners in the field



# CADER Program Benefits

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- **Accessible** – All courses and certificate programs are online and self-paced, allowing you to complete them anywhere and at any time
- **Quality Content** - Content developed by subject matter experts and reviewed by practitioners
- **Skill-based** - Tied to specific competencies needed for effective practice in the field
- **Professional Development** - Receive credentials from a nationally respected university that enhances your skill set and improves your qualifications
- **Make a Difference** - Training is designed so that you can put it into practice immediately, helping to improve the lives of older adults and people with disabilities
- **Learner Support** - Our staff will provide training support to help learners complete our programs



## NCOA Training Portal

At NCOA we believe every person deserves to age well. That's why we're on a path to improve the lives of 40 million older adults by 2030. We will deliver the resources, tools, best practices, and advocacy our nation needs to ensure that every person can age with health and financial security.



The National Council on Aging (NCOA) and the Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER) at Boston University have partnered to bring CADER's high quality online learning to our partners

in community-based organizations – including our NISC Affiliate members. For more than 80 years, senior centers have been their community's “go to” place for opportunities to age well. As the demands and expectations of senior centers change to meet growing and diverse needs, we want to ensure that professionals working in senior centers have the knowledge and skills to improve the lives of older adults.

→ ONLINE COURSE ACCESS

### FOR ONLINE LEARNERS

#### CADER/NCOA Behavioral Health in Aging Certificate Program [↗](#)

Behavioral Health Certificate Registration Link [↗](#)

#### NCOA/CADER Volunteer Engagement in the Aging Network

Volunteer Engagement Registration Link [↗](#)

Continuing Education Information [↗](#)



# NCOA & CADER Training Partnership

<https://thenetwork.bu.edu/ncoa-training-portal/>

# Background

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- As the older adult population grows, so does the number of older adults living with mental health and substance use concerns
- Research shows that the majority of older adults with mental health and substance use disorders do not receive necessary services and treatment
- Expansion of interventions to support older adults' mental health and overall wellness is an important preventative measure



# Background

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- According to the NCOA, there are more than 11,000 senior centers across the United States
- Senior centers are an ideal location for behavioral health education programs as they are the go-to place for many older adults
- Without training for senior center staff, older adults' mental health and substance use concerns may go unnoticed and untreated
- Competency-based trainings are a pragmatic and effective way to enhance the skillsets of staff at community-based agencies to identify, support, and refer older adults to necessary care



# Behavioral Health in Aging Certificate

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- Created by CADER
- Designed to improve the skills of staff at community-based organizations using an online self-paced curriculum

## Five Courses:

- 1 **Mental Health and Aging Issues**
- 2 **Suicide Prevention among Older Adults**
- 3 **Mental Wellness and Resilience among Older Immigrants and Refugees**
- 4 **Substance Use among Older Adults**
- 5 **Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias**



# Methods

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CADER and the NCOA collaborated to train senior center staff in Florida, Illinois, and Wisconsin using the Behavioral Health in Aging Certificate

- NCOA worked with the state senior center associations in each state to recruit senior center staff from rural, suburban, and urban areas
- The program was open to all senior center staff
- The program was funded by the RRF Foundation for Aging





# Certificate Program Participation

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228 senior center staff participated in the certificate program from 2018-2020

- 38% of learners were from Illinois
- 38% of learners were from Florida
- 24% of learners were from Wisconsin



# Certificate Program Participation

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## Demographics:

- 91% identified as female
- 70% identified as non-Hispanic White
- Average age was 47 (range 21-75)
- 38% held a bachelor's degree; 35% held a master's degree

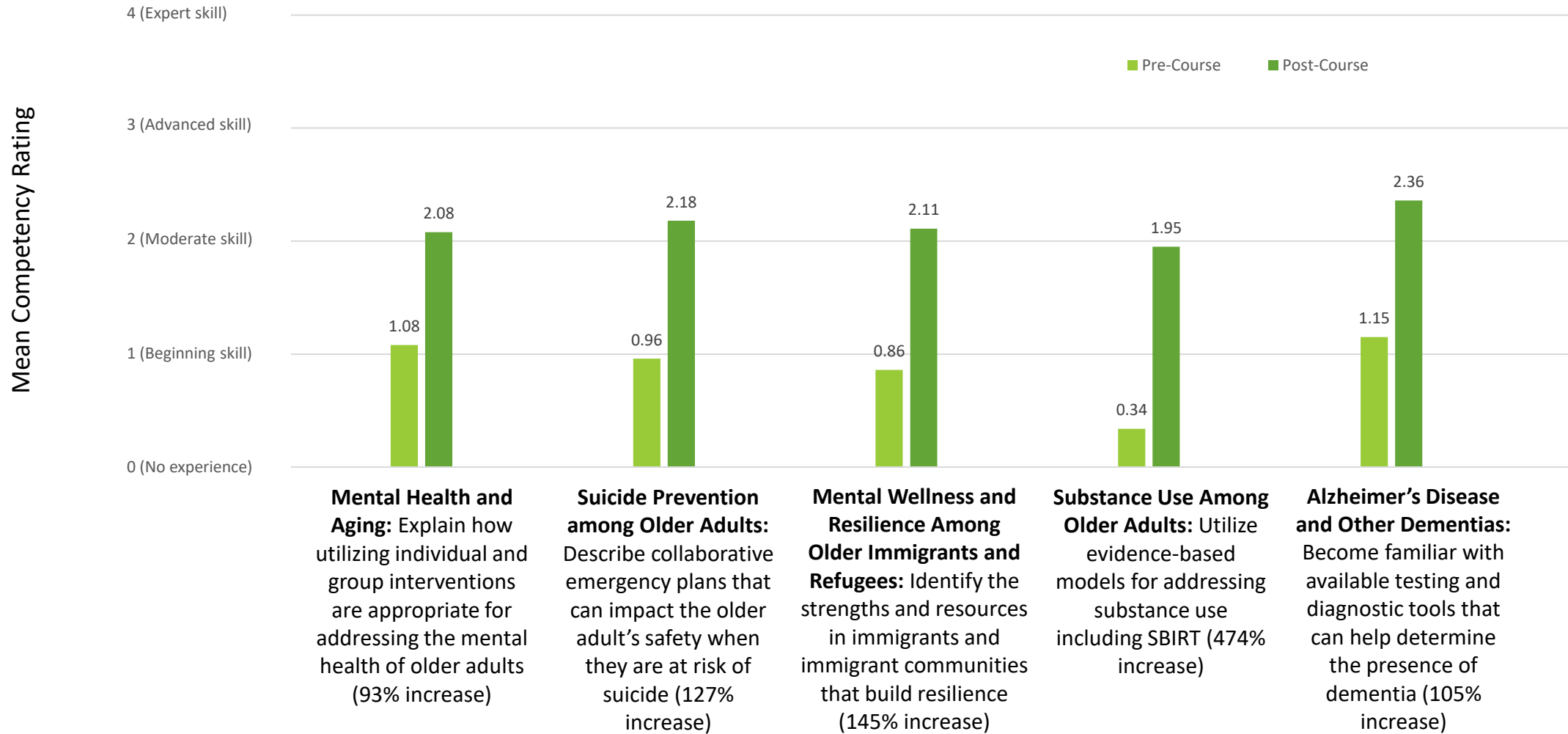
# Results: Competencies

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- At the beginning and end of each course, learners completed a self-assessment of their skill level in various competencies
  - Each course had approximately 6-10 competencies
  - Learners rated their skill level on a five-point scale: Not skilled at all; Beginning skill; Moderate skill; Advanced skill; Expert skill
- All competencies were significantly improved after taking the associated course ( $p < .001$ )

# Behavioral Health in Aging Certificate: Mean Competency Ratings Pre-Course and Post-Course



# Training Participant Interviews

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All participants who completed the BHA certificate program were invited to participate in an interview

- 15 semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted between 2019-2020
- The purpose of the key informant interviews was to gather information on:
  - facilitators and barriers to completion of the online certificate program
  - the perceived importance of the program content
  - the impact of the program on their daily interactions and work

# Interview Results

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Theme	Sample Quote
Changes in thoughts, skills, and behaviors	“I feel more observant. Because now that we have read the material of how to identify certain things when we talk to participants that might be dealing with depression, it’s easier to kind of recognize some of the signs.”
Memorable aspects of the program	“Defining of needs of diverse populations was most powerful since I am a suburban kid who doesn’t know that. Even though you think you know what [immigrants and refugees] need, you don’t know. Cultural sensitivity or humility - even though we talk about it, because the module was so in-depth, it was more powerful.”

# Interview Results

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Theme	Sample Quote
Individual Impact	<p>“For me, I have an increased confidence in addressing or evaluating what I’m seeing.”</p> <p>“I would say that for me that it bolstered my confidence and I’m more aware of resources out there and where to go.”</p>
Organizational Impact	<p>“I live in a small rural community, and we do have connections to our mental health providers, but we have very few mental health providers. So, I think I would encourage employees to really start reaching out to them to see what we could start offering jointly.”</p>



# Summary of Findings

- Senior center staff who completed the Behavioral Health in Aging certificate program gained skills in key competency areas.
- Learners were satisfied with the course materials and described the impacts of the program on the individual and organizational levels.
- High completion rates, significant changes in competencies, and a desire for more training, all speak to the success of this program.

# Conclusions

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- Providing training in behavioral health and aging to staff at community-based organizations can be a powerful intervention to increase knowledge and skills, which could result in better outcomes for older adults.
- Increased training could lead to more programs addressing behavioral health, which may increase discussions around these topics and reduce stigma.
- Future efforts should focus on long-term follow up with senior center directors and staff to further understand the impact of the training at their organizations.
- Additional state and federal funding is needed to support workforce training in order to sustain these important training initiatives and improve the care of older adults.

# Discussion Questions

- What behavioral health concerns do you see in older adults at your senior center or organization?
- What are the training needs at your senior center or organization?
- Describe some barriers to offering training at your organization.

# Contact Us

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