



CADER

**Center for Aging & Disability
Education & Research**

**Strengthening Age-Friendly Communities by
Addressing Behavioral Health Concerns among
Older Adults in Salem**
Evaluation Report



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

Project Background

The **Center for Aging & Disability Education & Research** (CADER), located at the Boston University School of Social Work, offers competency-based online training courses and certificate programs to strengthen the workforce that provides health and long-term supports and services to older adults and people with disabilities.



Salem for All Ages is the City of Salem's Age Friendly initiative begun in 2016. Salem for All Ages developed an action plan to make Salem, MA an age-friendly community, which they continue to implement, evaluate, and update to ensure that Salem is a safe and livable community for people of all ages.





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

Project Background

- The City of Salem, in collaboration with Salem for All Ages, partnered with CADER to develop a multi-faceted campaign aimed at addressing the behavioral health needs of older adults in the Salem community
 - The project focused on providing skills and resources to older adults, service providers, and the general Salem community to identify and address behavioral health concerns

Project Overview

Strengthening Age-Friendly Communities by Addressing Behavioral Health Concerns among Older Adults

Three Components:



A vibrant, stylized illustration of a landscape. It features various houses in shades of green, blue, and yellow, some with windows and doors. There are also trees in different colors and shapes, rolling hills, and clouds in the sky. A small sun or moon is visible in the upper right. The overall style is flat and modern.

Component 1: Media Campaign

Media Campaign

To provide the community with information on behavioral health and aging, CADER developed 9 flyers on behavioral health and aging topics

- Flyers were distributed to various community locations and through social media
- All flyers were distributed in English, Spanish, and Portuguese
- Each flyer listed resources that older adults can turn to for additional assistance



Coping with Loss and Change as We Age



As we age, we often experience loss and change. Below are some changes commonly experienced as we age, along with tips on how you can cope with these changes.

Change: Retirement

How to cope: Retirement can be a major life transition, as employment provides structure, social interaction, and a sense of purpose. To help cope with retirement, find a meaningful part-time job or volunteer opportunity. Establish a structured daily routine that incorporates socialization, physical activity, and hobbies.

Change: Loss of family members and friends

How to cope: Allow yourself time to grieve and remind yourself that grief is natural. Seek support from other personal relationships, or form new connections through volunteering or activities. If you need professional support, talk to your physician or call the free Massachusetts Behavioral Health Help Line at 833-773-2445.

Change: Declining physical abilities


How to cope: Declining physical abilities can make it more difficult to stay active and to attend social engagements. Changes in hearing and vision can also affect social relationships and can make it dangerous to drive. Try low-impact physical activities, such as tai chi, yoga, or swimming. Talk to your physician about assistive devices. Reach out to friends and family to see if they can help with transportation, or contact the Salem Council on Aging (978-744-0924) about their transportation offerings.



Media Campaign

Topics included:

- Looking Out for Yourself & Others
- Mental Wellness in Later Life
- Social Isolation
- Coping with Loss and Change as We Age
- Depression in Later Life
- Substance Use
- Alcohol Use
- Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias
- Suicide in Older Adults

A photograph of two women walking outdoors. On the left is a younger woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a white shirt and a blue scarf. On the right is an older woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a light purple jacket. They are both smiling and looking towards the right.

Navigating Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias

Dementia is a general term used to describe symptoms such as memory loss, challenges with thinking and reasoning, and language difficulties. Alzheimer's disease is a degenerative brain disease that can cause dementia and affects approximately 6.9 million older Americans.


Know the early signs of Alzheimer's and Other Dementias


- Memory loss, such as frequent forgetfulness of new information or events
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks, such as paying bills
- Confusion about time and place
- Trouble with language, such as speaking, following a conversation, or naming objects
- Changes in mood or personality, such as increased anxiety

Tips for caregivers and families of individuals living with dementia:

Daily care should include maintaining a routine, writing things down, encouraging physical activity, and providing enough time to complete tasks.	Create a supportive environment by minimizing clutter, utilizing labels and signage, improving lighting, installing grab bars, and removing tripping hazards.	Communicate by being patient, using simple language, maintaining eye contact, using nonverbal cues, and minimizing distractions.
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Ask for help! Contact the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at 1-800-272-3900. Or, learn more about the Salem Memory Café (401 Bridge Street, Salem, MA 01970, open the 4th Thursday of each month from 1:00 – 2:30 PM) by calling 978-744-0924.

 **SalemforAllAges.org**
Fostering Healthy Minds Through
Community Connections

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

Media Campaign

Approximately 2,400 printed flyers were distributed to community locations including:

- Salem Council on Aging
- Library
- Grocery stores
- Housing
- Healthcare sites
- Assisted living
- YMCA
- Churches
- Meals on Wheels



Media Campaign

Flyers were also distributed through social media.

Flyer	Reach (number of unique viewers)
Social Isolation	128,347
Looking Out for Yourself & Others	119,320
Mental Wellness in Later Life	18,550
Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias	10,229
Coping with Loss and Change as We Age	156
Substance Use	133
Alcohol Use	59
Depression in Later Life	51
Suicide in Older Adults	38

Note: Looking Out for Yourself & Others, Mental Wellness in Later Life, and Social Isolation were part of a paid ad campaign. Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias was boosted.





Component 2: Workshops for Older Adults

Four Workshops for Older Adults

1. Enhancing Your Mental Wellness
2. Coping with Loss and Change As We Age
3. LinkedIn Salem: Teens and Older Adults Making Connections
(Intergenerational)
4. Understanding Substance Use in Later Life



A live Spanish translator was present for each workshop.



Enhancing Your Mental Wellness Workshop

- Held at the Salem YMCA
- 10 attendees
- Focused on teaching older adults to maintain their own mental well-being and how to look out for the well-being of other older adults



After the workshop, 100% of attendees agreed with the statement:
“I know how to support my mental well-being.”

Coping with Loss and Change Workshop

- Held at Espacio
- 13 attendees
- Focused on grief, coping with loss, and navigating change throughout aging

100% of attendees rated the quality of the workshop as good or excellent.

”

Important topic to present to our community and to have someone talk about it so openly and positively.

-Workshop participant



Intergenerational Workshop

- Held at Salem Academy Charter School
- 19 high school students and 14 older adults attended
- The workshop included a presentation on social isolation, aging, and the pillars of health; followed by guided intergenerational conversations around connectedness



Intergenerational Workshop

After the workshop:

97%

of attendees agreed
with the statement:
“I know how I can
build and strengthen
my connections with
others.”

97%

of attendees agreed
with the statement:
“Building
intergenerational
connections is a good
strategy to reduce
loneliness.”

94%

of attendees agreed
with the statement:
“I know what I can
do to help reduce
loneliness in
others.”



Intergenerational Workshop: Feedback

Student Feedback:

"I loved the people at my table!! Super connected!"

"I really enjoyed this experience."

"I had a really good time! It was nice meeting new people and I hope we can do this again."



Older Adult Feedback:

"Loved working/conversing with the students."

"This intergenerational group was fantastic. Keep going!"

"This was a changing of thoughts for me. Extremely informative & allowed me to gain knowledge."

"The students are amazing."

Substance Use in Later Life Workshop

- Held at the Salem Council on Aging
- 6 attendees
- Focused on the impact of substance use on well-being, risk factors, and available resources

100% of attendees rated the quality of the workshop as good or excellent.



A stylized, flat-design illustration of a town or neighborhood. It features various houses in shades of green, blue, and white, some with multiple windows. There are several trees of different shapes and sizes, some with green foliage and others with dark blue or teal leaves. The background includes a light blue sky with a few small white clouds and a bright yellow sun with a green center. The overall color palette is dominated by greens, blues, and whites, creating a clean and modern aesthetic.

Component 3: *CADER's Behavioral Health in Aging Certificate Program*

Behavioral Health in Aging Certificate Program

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**

- Online, self-paced five course program developed by CADER
- Provides information on:
 - Major mental health conditions and substance use concerns facing older adults
 - Promoting mental wellness and resilience
 - Suicide prevention
 - Screening, assessment, and evidence-based interventions

Scan to view on
CADER's website!



Behavioral Health in Aging Certificate Program

14 learners completed the certificate program between June 20, 2024 to March 14, 2025. Below is a breakdown of learners' job roles, workplaces, and highest level of education.

Job Roles:

- Clerk (2)
- Resident Service Coordinator (2)
- Social Worker (2)
- Case Manager
- Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator
- Human Service Coordinator
- Library Staff
- Practicum Coordinator
- Sanitarian
- Utilization Review Coordinator
- Workplace Safety Coordinator

Workplace:

- City of Salem (8)
- Healthcare System (3)
- Nonprofit
- State Department
- University

Highest Level of Education:

- Some college, but no degree (1)
- Bachelor's Degree (6)
 - BSW (1)
- Master's Degree (7)
 - MSW (4)



Certificate Program Evaluation Results

The following slides present the evaluation results, including:

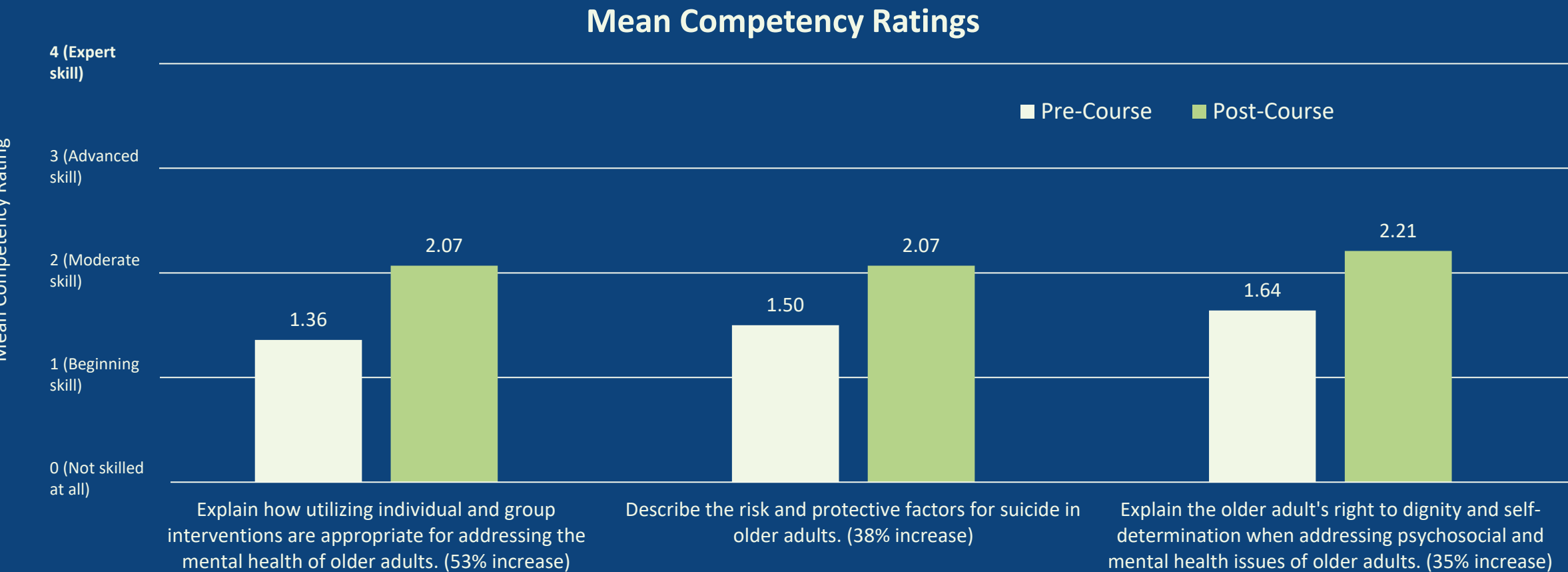
- **Competencies:** At the beginning and end of each course, learners were asked to rate their skill level in various competencies using the following scale: 0 - Not skilled at all; 1 - Beginning skill; 2 - Moderate skill; 3 - Advanced skill; 4 - Expert skill.
- **Learner Feedback:** At the end of each course, learners shared their feedback about the course and were asked how the course will impact their practice.
- **General Course Evaluation:** At the end of each course, learners were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of course evaluation questions.



Results: Competencies

Course 1: Mental Health and Aging Issues

The following graph shows mean competency ratings for the three course competencies with the greatest percent increases, which were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).



Results: Feedback

Course 1: Mental Health and Aging Issues

General course feedback:

- *“I think the content was very good and I appreciated being able to stop and pick up again at different times.”*
- *“Learning about institutional barriers and the policies that influenced these barriers was very informative.”*

How the course will impact their practice:

- *“Utilize some of the screening tools, be more informed about the various evidence-based approaches.”*
- *“More understanding and considerate of mental health possibilities with my older clients.”*

100%

of learners would recommend the course to colleagues.

100%

of learners agreed that the training will help them apply practice skills in the topic area.

100%

of learners agreed that the training expanded their understanding of the topic area.

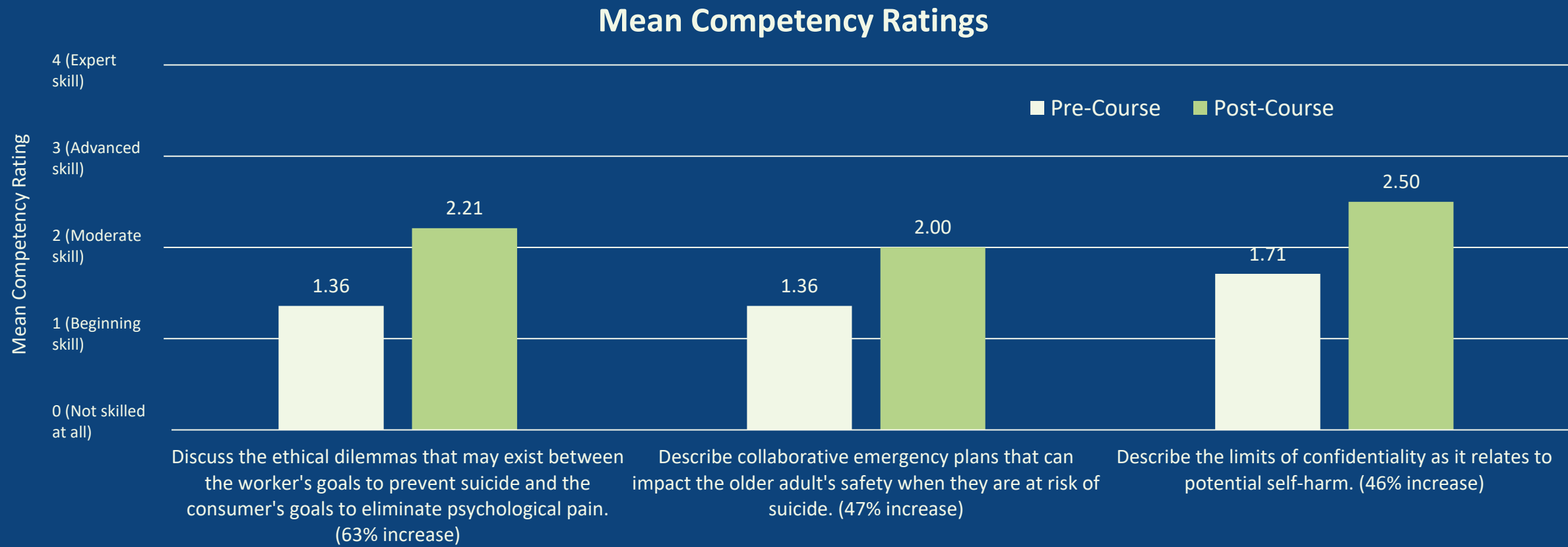
100%

of learners agreed that the information in the course was effectively presented.

Results: Competencies

Course 2: Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults

The following graph shows mean competency ratings for the three course competencies with the greatest percent increases, which were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).



Results: Feedback

Course 2: Suicide Prevention Among Older Adults

General course feedback:

- *“This course is informative, relevant and well organized.”*
- *“I thought this was a really good course.”*

How the course will impact their practice:

- *“Making more informed decisions in risk assessment.”*
- *“Be more observant in what people say and do.”*

93%

of learners would recommend the course to colleagues.

100%

of learners agreed that the training will help them apply practice skills in the topic area.

93%

of learners agreed that the training expanded their understanding of the topic area.

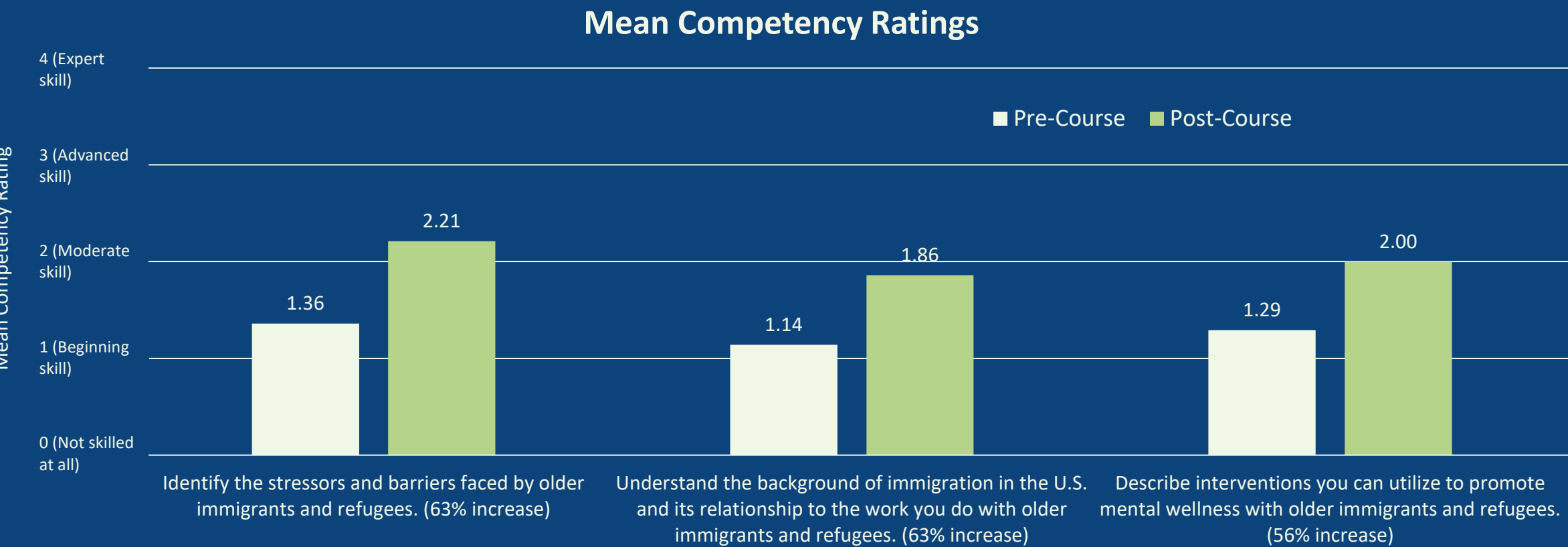
93%

of learners agreed that the information in the course was effectively presented.

Results: Competencies

Course 3: Mental Wellness and Resilience Among Older Immigrants and Refugees

The following graph shows mean competency ratings for the three course competencies with the greatest percent increases, which were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).



Results: Feedback

Course 3: Mental Wellness and Resilience Among Older Immigrants and Refugees

General course feedback:

- *“The examples are always really helpful in developing my understanding.”*
- *“Reminders of ways in which people who've immigrated can be resourceful and resilient.”*

How the course will impact their practice:

- *“I'll be able to provide better discharge plans to my immigration patients.”*
- *“I will have a better understanding of the challenges that older immigrants face.”*

93%

of learners would recommend the course to colleagues.

92%

of learners agreed that the training will help them apply practice skills in the topic area.

93%

of learners agreed that the training expanded their understanding of the topic area.

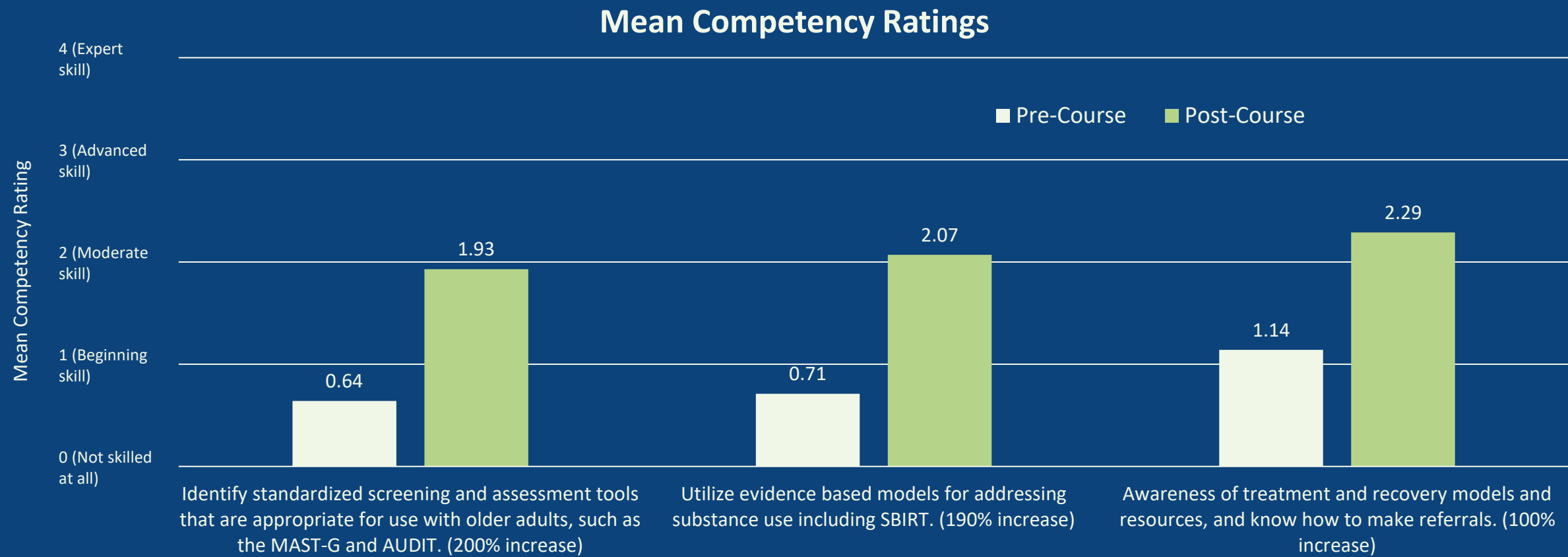
100%

of learners agreed that the information in the course was effectively presented.

Results: Competencies

Course 4: Substance Use Among Older Adults

The following graph shows mean competency ratings for the three course competencies with the greatest percent increases, which were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).



Results: Feedback

Course 4: Substance Use Among Older Adults

General course feedback:

- *“This information is greatly needed.”*
- *“The examples are always very helpful.”*
- *“Loved the videos.”*

How the course will impact their practice:

- *“Having more awareness of the barriers to older adults receiving substance use disorder treatment.”*
- *“Being more open minded and less bias regarding people struggles with substance use.”*

93%

of learners would recommend the course to colleagues.

92%

of learners agreed that the training will help them apply practice skills in the topic area.

93%

of learners agreed that the training expanded their understanding of the topic area.

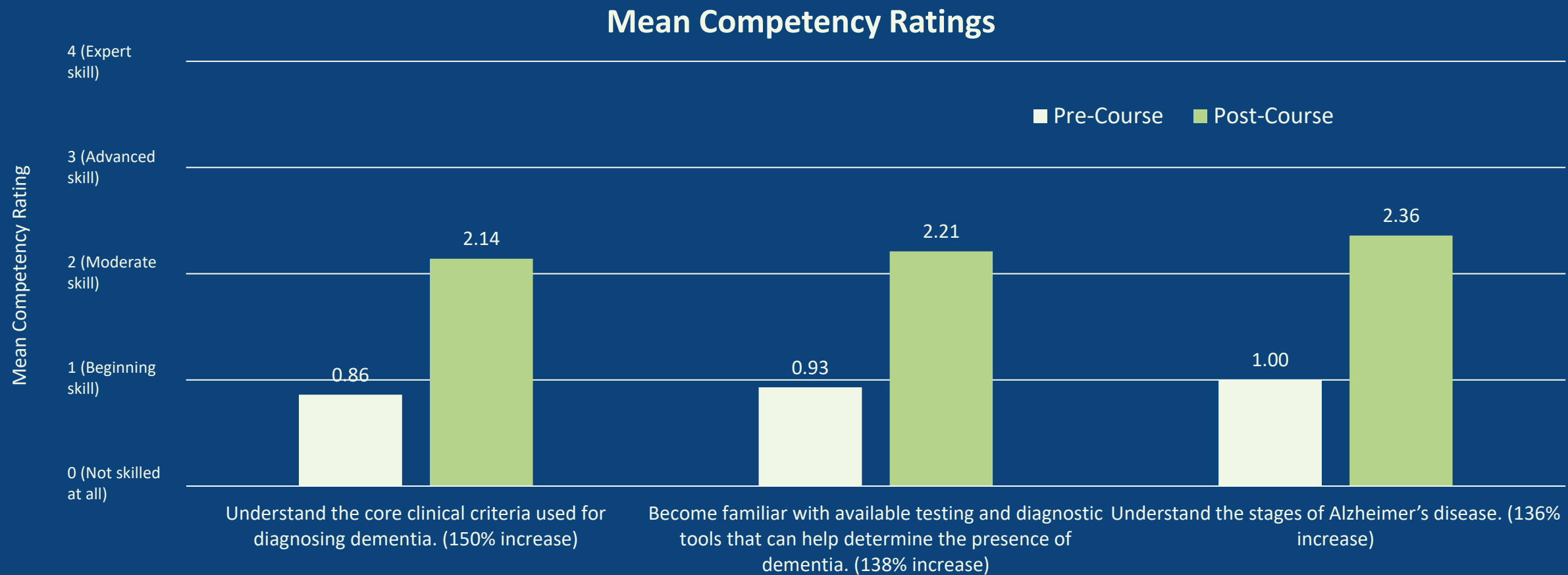
93%

of learners agreed that the information in the course was effectively presented.

Results: Competencies

Course 5: Alzheimer’s Disease and Other Dementias

The following graph shows mean competency ratings for the three course competencies with the greatest percent increases, which were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).



Results: Feedback

Course 5: Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias

General course feedback:

- *"This entire course was very informative, thank you!"*
- *"Great informative topic and the videos were helpful."*

How the course will impact their practice:

- *"Use some of the strategies listed when working with these patients and caregivers."*
- *"Not to judge too quickly, there are so many people out there going through so many different issues that wouldn't have crossed my mind."*

93%

of learners would recommend the course to colleagues.

92%

of learners agreed that the training will help them apply practice skills in the topic area.

86%

of learners agreed that the training expanded their understanding of the topic area.

93%

of learners agreed that the information in the course was effectively presented.

Live Training Sessions

To complement the certificate program, CADER hosted two live training sessions:

- **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Older Adults Training**
- **Dementia Friends Training**

Both sessions were open to certificate program enrollees, as well as anyone who works in Salem.



Live Training Session: Mental Health & Suicide

8 people attended a live training session focused on identifying mental health concerns, resiliency, techniques for addressing mental health concerns, and suicide risk.

Feedback:

“Great coverage of this topic!”

“Excellent!”

100%

of attendees agreed with the statement: “This training will help me feel more confident when working with older adults with mental health concerns.”

100%

of attendees agreed with the statement: “This training will help me provide better services and supports to older adults with mental health concerns.”

Live Training Session: Dementia Friends

13 people attended a Dementia Friends Workshop focused on:

- The signs and symptoms of dementia
- Communicating with people living with dementia
- Key messages about dementia
- Turning your understanding of dementia into action



Live Training Session: Dementia Friends

6 out of 7 respondents agreed with the statements:

My awareness has increased about Alzheimer's and other related dementias.

I feel more confident/equipped as a community member to recognize the signs and offer support to the needs of a person living with dementia trying to navigate in the community.

Feedback:

“The examples provided throughout were super helpful in understanding the statements/slides.”

“Great tips on how to interact.”

“Will be useful in both my work and personal lives.”

“Great presentation and easily understandable for the novice.”

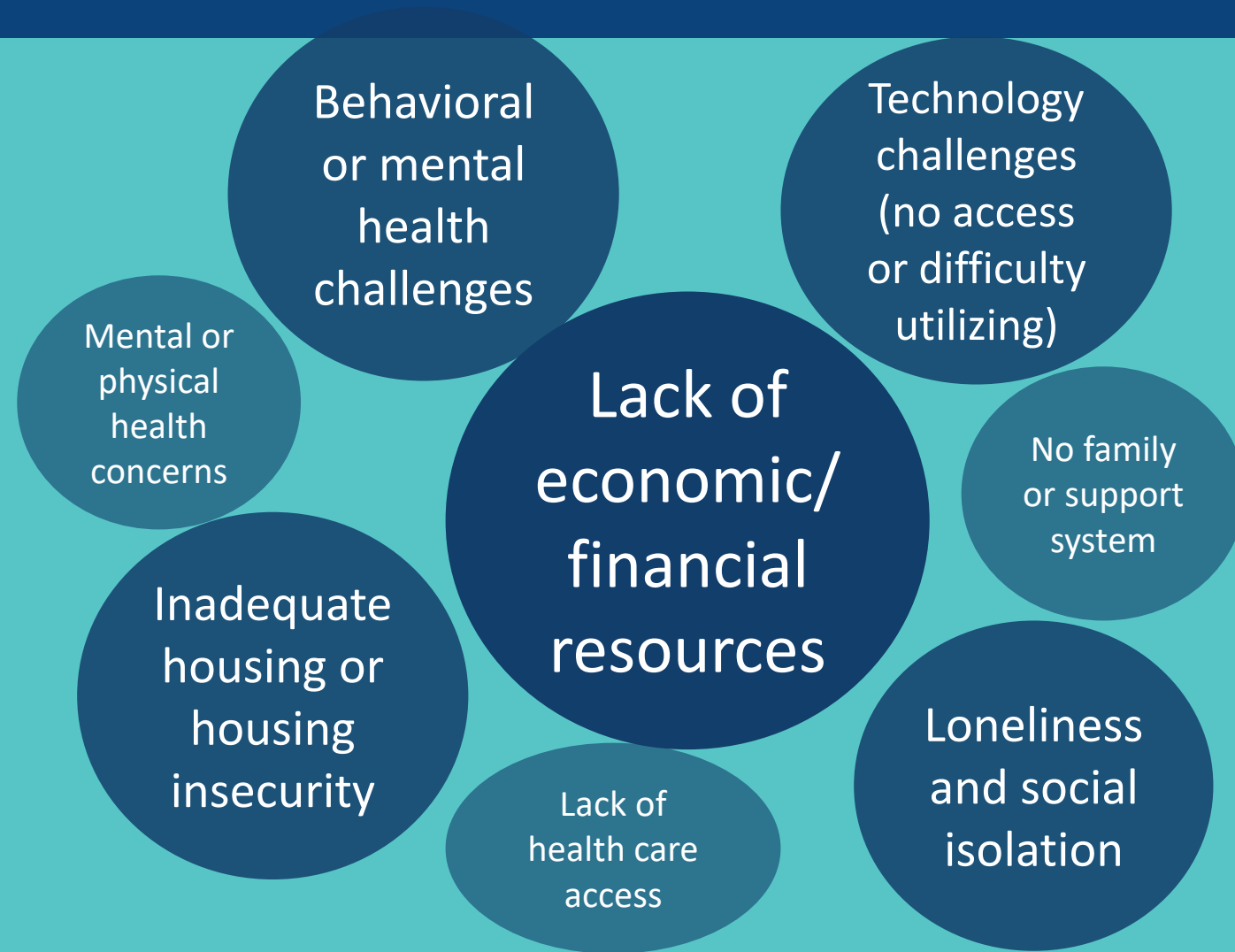


Additional Findings

Workforce Perspective: Needs of Older Adults in Salem

We asked **professionals** who completed the Behavioral Health in Aging certificate program what challenges the older adults they work with face.

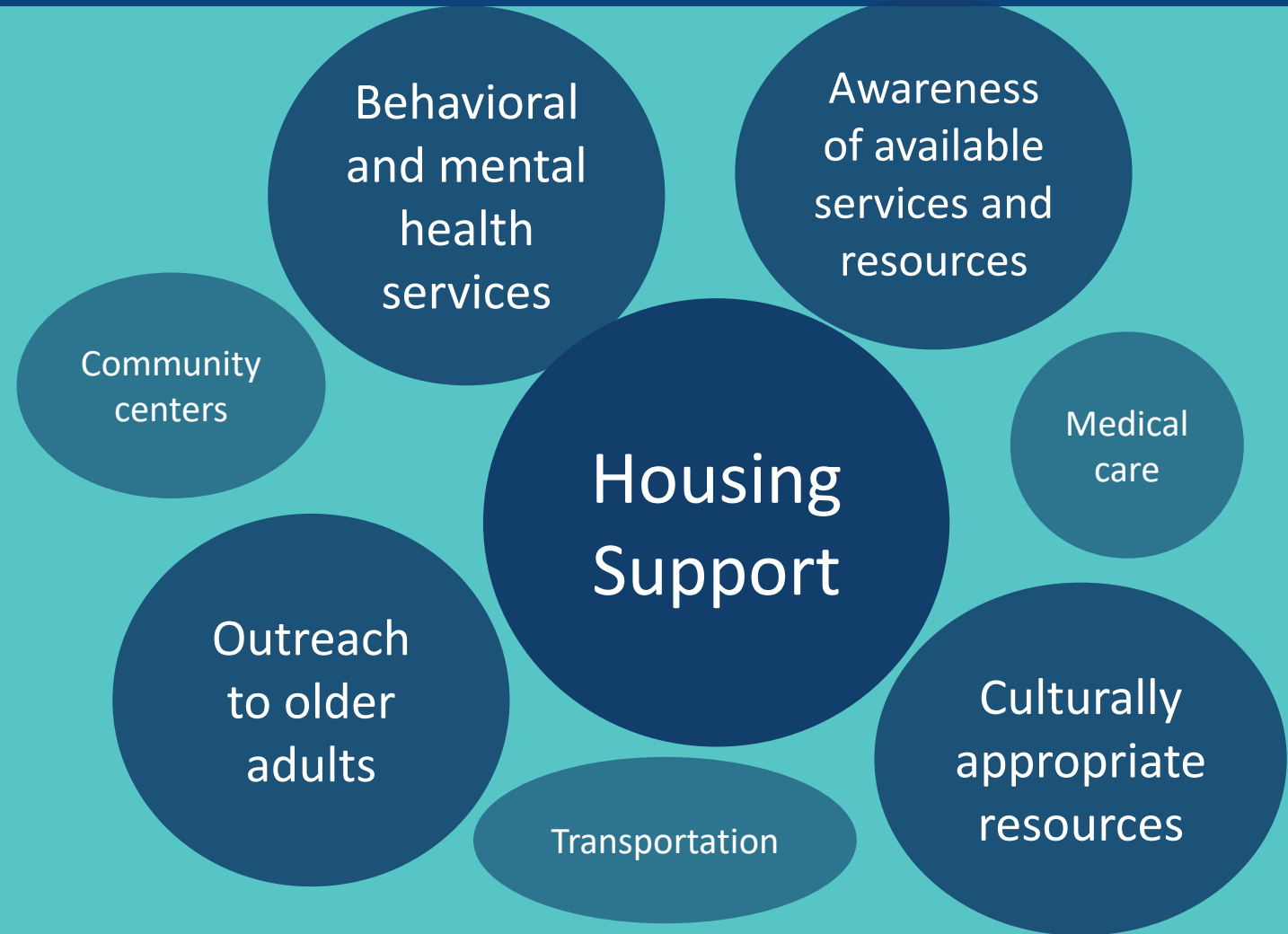
Topics in larger font were mentioned more frequently.



Workforce Perspective: Needs of Older Adults in Salem

We asked **professionals** who completed the Behavioral Health in Aging certificate program what supports older adults in Salem need to live healthy lives.

Topics in larger font were mentioned more frequently.



Older Adult Perspective: Needs of Older Adults in Salem

After each workshop, we asked **older adults** what additional resources they need to support their well-being.

Topics in larger font were mentioned more frequently.



Older Adult Perspective

After each workshop, **older adults** were asked the following questions:

How connected are you to the City of Salem Age Friendly Initiative?

Responses:

- Not at all connected: 60%
- Connected: 30%
- Very Connected: 10%

Do you feel that the City of Salem provides access to the services you need to support your well-being?

Responses:

- No: 12%
- Yes: 38%
- Sometimes: 50%



Conclusions

- Salem professionals who completed the Behavioral Health in Aging certificate program gained skills in key competency areas and indicated that they felt better prepared to support older adults with behavioral health concerns
 - Learners showed the largest gains in skill level for the *Substance Use Among Older Adults* course and the *Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias* course, indicating that these are potentially key topic areas for additional training initiatives



Conclusions

- Older adults who attended workshops found the workshops helpful and requested additional workshops
 - Participants requested that intergenerational programming continue
- Older adults need additional support in transportation, housing, language services, financial well-being, behavioral and mental health, and other areas



Future Directions

- Future workshops should focus on building social and community connections, increasing older adults' awareness of the resources available to them, and utilizing technology
- Additional outreach to older adults is needed to increase participation in workshops and engagement with Salem for All Ages, and reach more diverse communities
- Continued city-wide training across providers and settings would be beneficial to further knowledge of behavioral health and aging





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