

# Understanding Substance Use in Later Life



Substance abuse in older adults often remains hidden and misunderstood. Older adults are prescribed more medications than other age groups, increasing the risk of misusing medications and the risk of consuming dangerous drug combinations. Additionally, certain substances may increase an older adult's risk of falling which can lead to serious injuries. It is important that we all know how to recognize substance use concerns and how to get help.

## What is substance abuse?

Substance abuse includes:

- Using illegal drugs
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Consuming more prescription medication than was prescribed
- Consuming excessive amounts of over-the-counter medication

## What should I do if I or someone I know needs support?

- Talk to your physician about your concerns
- Research whether there are any support groups in your area
- Call a helpline. All of the following helplines are free and available 24/7:
  - MA Behavioral Health Helpline: 833-773-2445
  - MA Substance Use Helpline: 800-327-5050
  - SAMHSA National Helpline: 800-662-4357

## How do I recognize substance abuse in older adults?

Ask yourself if the following are true:

- Do they feel the need to consume the substance every day?
- Have they increased their use of the substance over time?
- Do they seem less interested in socializing and other activities?
- Does use of the substance have a negative impact on their life, yet they continue to use it?
- Have they tried to stop using the substance and failed?

