

Under the category for healthy aging:

When we consider the health of senior citizens several factors come to mind regarding issues that cause health to decline as people age. Problems such as cognitive decline, loneliness, isolation, increased falls, homelessness, lack of access to medical care and to social supports, as well as the deterioration of mental health all contribute to a poor quality of life in later years. As a society it is our responsibility to provide care to the most vulnerable of citizens. One issue that is often not discussed is the growing problem of substance abuse among the baby boomer generation.

Substance abuse is often the cause of those aforementioned problems. Many seniors turn to alcohol or abuse their prescribed medications in order to combat feelings of loneliness, isolation, boredom and grief. Addiction is frequently a direct cause of cognitive decline and homelessness. It accelerates the deterioration of mental health and contributes to falls and social isolation. We must support increases in funding for substance abuse treatment, particularly for senior citizens – an often overlooked population in addiction treatment. We need to increase the number and quality of programs that target this age group. Although seniors respond very well to substance abuse treatment, traditional treatment programs are ill equipped to handle the myriad of medical problems that seniors present. Those who do succeed in treatment often relapse because they are discharged back into the shelter system. We must provide them with safe housing and ongoing supports.

Susan Wilk CAC, RSS
Senior Outreach Counselor
InterCommunity Recovery Centers