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## **State Department on Aging and Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Release Behavioral Health Unmet Needs Report for Older Adults**

*Connecticut will see a 30% increase in residents 60 years old and older from 2012 to 2030*

(Hartford, CT) – The Connecticut State Department on Aging (SDA) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) released findings from the Aging and Disability Resource Center’s Study, *Meeting the Needs of Older Adults with Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Disorders: A Statewide Asset Mapping Evaluation in Connecticut*. The report identifies resource strengths, barriers and service gaps within the state’s behavioral health system towards meeting the needs of adults age 55 and older and provides recommendations on how to better serve older residents.

“With our growing senior population, it’s especially important to ensure programs and services are broadly accessible, affordable, and working to the full benefit of seniors and their families,” said Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman. “This report gets us one step closer to ensuring that state government is a partner in reaching those goals.”

Mental health is a central component to healthy aging. However, until recently, there has been no specific data on how Connecticut’s behavioral health system addresses the behavioral health needs of its older residents. This report not only quantifies the strengths in the existing behavioral health system that should be expanded and enhanced, but also identifies certain factors contributing to the crisis of unmet behavioral health needs. Examples of these factors include a lack of services in certain parts of the state; a workforce that lacks geriatric behavioral health knowledge and skills; lack of integration of behavioral health, physical health, and aging services; and insurance barriers.

“This timely report brings to light a crisis in our state’s ability to meet the behavioral health needs of Connecticut’s older adults,” said State Department on Aging Commissioner, Betsy Ritter. “Many factors contribute to this crisis, leading to a decrease in quality of life, an increase in the utilization of health care services, higher mortality rates, and in some situations, unnecessary institutionalization.”

“As a state, across the lifespan we need to acknowledge the critical connection between behavioral health and physical health. This is especially true as we grow older because of the physiological and psychosocial changes that accompany aging,” stated DMHAS Commissioner, Miriam Delphin-Rittmon.

“This report speaks to the importance of this connection for healthy aging and offers recommendations that are compatible with current initiatives to improve the state’s health care system for all residents.”

“This study shows that access to behavioral health systems are largely absent in rural areas, where there are shortages in geriatric services and transportation -- we need to do better,” said Senator Mae Flexer (D-Killingly), Chairwoman of the Aging Committee. “I welcome the recommendations in this report, which will help to inform lawmakers as the state moves forward with collaborations to address areas of deficiency in our healthcare system, with respect to the behavioral and physical needs of the geriatric population.”

"This compelling report is a clarion call to action when it comes to the mental health of older adults in Connecticut," said State Representative John K. Hampton (D-Simsbury). "As policymakers, we commit ourselves to a comprehensive plan to prepare for the anticipated dramatic increase of adults 60 and older in our state. That plan will include meaningful programs and initiatives that address the unmet behavioral health needs of senior citizens."

The report is the first step towards improving resources and access to behavioral health and substance abuse services for Connecticut’s older adult population. The report provides a road map for the State Department on Aging and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to lead an effort to support and strengthen existing programs and services, improve access to information and resources for consumers and professionals, focus on workforce development that increases provider knowledge of older adult physical and behavioral health care needs and how to connect individuals to services, and promote the integration of behavioral health, physical health and aging services. Ultimately, the goal is to enhance the state’s healthcare system in a manner that is visible, accessible, affordable and meets the specific needs of the older adult population.

The report is available on the State Department on Aging website at <http://www.ct.gov/SDA/nowrongdoor>. For more information about the report and behavioral health services for older adults, please contact Diana Lejardi at (860) 418-6967 or [diana.lejardi@ct.gov](mailto:diana.lejardi@ct.gov).

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