

Wellness Initiative for Senior Education (WISE) Program: *An Evidence-based Wellness Program For Older Adults*

Abuse of alcohol, other drugs, and prescribed and over-the-counter medications is a very real problem among older adults in America.¹ Between 2004 and 2009, the number of substance abuse treatment admissions for people 50 and older increased by nearly 50 percent, according to the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). By 2020, the number of adults age 50 and older needing substance abuse treatment is expected to double from 2.8 million (2002 to 2006 annual average) to 5.7 million. And few facilities offer programs or groups specifically for older adults, even though experts recommend that they receive services that are age specific and address the unique physical, psychological, social and vocational changes that may occur to individuals after age 50.²

The WISE Program is a substance abuse prevention and wellness program targeting older adults created by the New Jersey Prevention Network (NJPN). WISE promotes health through six education sessions that address high-risk behaviors in older adults.

The WISE Program is designed to help older adults celebrate healthy aging, make healthy lifestyle choices and avoid substance abuse. The curriculum is designed to take place once per week over a six-week period. Each of the six lessons is about two hours in length, not including breaks or refreshments.

The program's interactive lessons provides valuable educational services to older adults on topics including health and wellness, medication use, stress management, depression and substance abuse.

The WISE Program has been recognized as an evidence-based prevention program by the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP). The independent evaluation of the program was conducted by the Institute for Families at the Rutgers School of Social Work in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

The WISE Program has been offered widely throughout New Jersey since it was launched in 1996 and has reached over 40,000 older adults. NJPN welcomes the opportunity to share this evidence-based program with you to help serve seniors in your communities. Please contact NJPN for more information.



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¹ Han, B., Gfroerer, J. C., Colliver, J. D., & Penne, M. A. (2009). Substance use disorder among older adults in the United States in 2002. *Addiction, 104*(1), 88-96. doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2008.02411.x.

² Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (1998). *Substance abuse among older adults (Treatment Improvement Protocol Series 26; HHS Publication No. SMA 98-3179)*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Six-lesson Curriculum at a Glance



Lesson One: Understanding the Changes Associated with Aging

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Better understanding of the facts and myths of aging
- ♦ Greater familiarity with the top ten causes of death in America
- ♦ Enhanced knowledge of what places individuals at risk for premature death and how to avoid these risks
- ♦ Heightened awareness of the risk of depression among seniors

Lesson Two: Aging Sensitivity

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Better understanding of the biological changes associated with aging
- ♦ Greater insight into our own feelings about aging
- ♦ Heightened awareness of the advantages of growing older

Lesson Three: Valuing Cultural and Generational Diversity

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Expanded understanding of the concepts of culture and diversity
- ♦ Improved ability to name our own cultural identifications, how they impact our values and the ways we interact with others
- ♦ Better understanding of the diversity of senior citizens and the unique needs of different types of seniors
- ♦ Heightened awareness of the assumptions people commonly make about various cultural groups and how they affect social interaction

Lesson Four: Medication and the Older Adult

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Increased awareness of the prevalence of medication use among older adults
- ♦ Improved ability to identify the behaviors that lead to medication misuse
- ♦ Expanded knowledge of how to manage medication use
- ♦ Greater familiarity with drugs commonly used by older adults, typical adverse reactions to drugs, and age-related changes in how drugs are metabolized
- ♦ Improved ability to relate critical information to health care providers and ask important questions relevant to medication use

Lesson Five: Addiction, ATOD (Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs) and the Older Adult

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Increased understanding of addiction as a disease
- ♦ Improved ability to identify the signs of alcohol abuse among seniors
- ♦ Expanded knowledge of the effects of ATOD use and abuse
- ♦ Greater familiarity with the health risks and treatment options for addiction
- ♦ Improved ability to identify factors that place older adults at risk for ATOD abuse and protective factors that can help prevent it

Lesson Six: An Enhanced Quality of Life

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Greater familiarity with strategies for maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- ♦ Increased awareness of our personal “stress triggers”
- ♦ Heightened awareness of our personal values and how they influence the way we think and act

Key Findings of Independent Program Evaluation

- WISE Program participants increased their knowledge regarding how their bodies age, how the aging process affects their ability to metabolize alcohol and medications, and how to recognize the early signs and symptoms of depression.
- WISE participants were more likely to improve health behaviors related to lifestyle choices, health care empowerment, and use of prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- WISE participants who completed the WISE Program reported greater increases in social support over time.

