

# Aging and Mental Illness

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Aging is a normal part of life. In Canada, 13% of our population is over 65 years of age and by 2016 it is estimated that over six million Canadians will be over 65. For many aging is a meaningful exciting time filled with positive experiences but for others it is characterized by losses.

The changes of developing a mental illness or disorder do not diminish with age. The most common mental disorders experienced by seniors include; dementia, depression, increased risk of suicidal tendencies and substance abuse.

## Quick facts:

- Approximately 8% of the population over 65 meet the criteria for dementia. This rate rises to 34.5% for individuals over the age of 85
- Dementia involves the loss of memory and thinking skills and affects 8% of Canadians over 65
- Alzheimer's is the diagnosis for 60% of dementia cases
- Depression co-exists with dementia in 20% to 30% of cases. The National Advisory Council on Aging estimates 30% to 40% of seniors living in institutions experience a degree of depression
- Seniors are more likely to complain of physical problems, tiredness and sleep difficulty than emotional complaints. This results in difficulty correctly diagnosing and treating depression

Experiences of loss (friends, spouse, professional connections, etc.) are common as we age and can put individuals at risk for mental illness. Strengthening social supports from friends, family, health professionals and peers can help reduce the impact and severity. Successful strategies to help senior's combat mental illness and addiction include talk therapy, psychiatric medication, exercise and strong social connections.

## Talk About It

Visit [www.virtualwellness.ualberta.ca](http://www.virtualwellness.ualberta.ca) and select Facing Facts.

### Contact Information:

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