This fact sheet summarizes key findings from the third webinar in the series “Substance Abuse Among Older Adults: An Emerging Public Health Crisis,” which is coordinated by SAMHSA’s State TA Project. The fact sheet also contains information from the “Developing or Enhancing Your State’s Older Adult Behavioral Health Services, A Behavioral Health Resource Guide.” This webinar aired in March 2018 and featured Frederic Blow, Ph.D. The full webinar and others in the series can be viewed here: https://www.jbsinternational.com/expertise/opioid-epidemic/substance-abuse-among-older-adults-webinars.

THE POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF DATA
Rising substance use and abuse rates among older adults in the United States has increased the importance of and need for assessment of the substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment needs of this population to guide the allocation of resources. Data is essential to inform this process, and individual- and population-level assessment tools can be used to understand the needs within and across communities. Screening tools, such as the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test and the Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test, measure an individual’s level of substance use and associated consequences in order to identify individuals at risk for substance misuse and abuse and determine the need for further assessment or treatment. Population-level data—available through numerous state and local data sources including vital statistics, emergency room data, prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) databases, and wide-scale surveys—can be used to assess the scope of the problem and help identify interventions and policies needed to enhance the health of the older adult population. Behavioral health needs assessments for older adults must be comprehensive.

National sources of state and regional data on older adults:
- National Survey on Drug Use and Health (SAMHSA)
- Treatment Episode Data Set (SAMHSA)
- Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

Sources of elder abuse incidence data:
- National Center on Elder Abuse (https://ncea.acl.gov)
- Department of Justice’s Elder Justice Initiative (https://www.justice.gov/elderjustice)
The assessments should include demographic data, consequence rates, substance use behaviors and patterns, family and community norms, and system supports. In some areas, it may be difficult to collect all the suggested data, but it is important to collect as much as possible.

PDMPs are a powerful resource for tracking population-level data through the use of electronic databases. Effective state PDMPs are easy to use and access, monitor a broad array of drugs with abuse potential, mandate physician and pharmacy reporting, and contain real-time prescription data to effectively track the prescribing and dispensing of controlled prescription drugs. Research has shown that states that have more robust PDMP programs have seen reductions in opioid prescriptions and lower morbidity and mortality.

STATE SUCCESSES: Decreases in Opioid Prescribing

Average Morphine Milligram Equivalents (MME) per person decreased in most counties in Florida, Ohio, and Kentucky from 2010 to 2015.

These states have regulated pain clinics and set requirements for their state’s PDMP.

PDMP, Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, is a state-run electronic database used to track the prescribing and dispensing of controlled prescription drugs to patients.

MME is a way to calculate the amount of opioids, accounting for differences in opioid drug type and strength.

Potential Partners
- Funders or potential funders
- Medicaid representatives
- Local government
- Area agencies on aging
- Community mental health centers
- Substance use disorder treatment providers
- Prevention programs/coalitions
- Federally qualified health centers
- Schools of nursing, social work, public health
- Elected officials
- Senior service centers
- Older adults
- Tribes
- Businesses
- Faith-based organizations
- Physicians/hospitals
- Geriatric education centers

For more information on this topic, or resources to help prevent alcohol and drug abuse or prescription misuse among older adults, visit https://www.jbsinternational.com/expertise/opioid-epidemic/substance-abuse-among-older-adults-webinars.