



# OSAM-O-GRAM



DATE: January 2007

DATELINE: Ohio

Wright State University & the University of Akron

## Targeted Response Initiative on Substance Abuse among Older Adults Part III: Reasons for Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse

According to the study participants, among seniors, alcohol and other drugs are often used to deal with **loneliness, boredom** and **depression** caused by increased social isolation and the lack of family involvement and support. Substance abuse problems among older-aged adults were also associated with the death of a spouse or other family members, the loss of independence, and other life transitions associated with aging. For example, a female senior from Cleveland commented:

*It's [alcohol abuse] common because of loneliness. A lot of us are alone. You have a spouse who is ill, and you are taking care of him and still you are more or less alone in that situation. A lot of time your family is just not around. You start drinking pretty hard.*

**Lifetime histories of alcohol and other drug abuse** are common factors associated with substance abuse problems among older-aged people. According to service providers and seniors, some individuals have simply carried their substance abuse habits into old age. For example, service providers who participated in the Dayton area focus group commented:

*Home Aide 1: I would say also lifestyle, because I had that one man and I mean, that's just the way he was all his life... just liked to do drugs....*

*Home Aide 2: Yeah, I would have to agree because I talked to my client, and he just told me his whole background, and it's pretty much been partyin' his whole life....*

In some situations, abuse of pharmaceutical drugs among the seniors is related to the self-medication of physical health problems and easy access to pharmaceutical drugs via legitimate prescriptions and "doctor shopping." For example, one senior participant from Cleveland commented:

*They [doctors] should pay attention to how long people stay on what... Doctors don't talk to each other. They don't share tests. The second doctor prescribes the same things and even more powerful.*

**Social service delivery issues** were also discussed as contributing factors to substance abuse problems among low income seniors. According to participants, the environment of some public housing facilities may increase social isolation and boredom among the older-aged people, thereby contributing to problem behaviors such as drinking. In addition, since seniors may live in the public housing facilities with younger individuals, some older-aged residents may be victimized and become exposed to a range of illegal activities, including drug dealing and abuse.

Our findings suggest that reasons for alcohol and other drug abuse among seniors vary substantially, but tend to center around issues of isolation and depression.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the January 2007 OSAM Network meeting.

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