

# BACKGROUND

## Mental Health First Aid Seniors

### What is Mental Health First Aid?

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved.

MHFA Canada is a program of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. It aims to improve mental health literacy, and provide the skills and knowledge to help people better manage potential or developing mental health problems in themselves, a family member, a friend or a colleague.

MHFA was developed in Australia by Betty Kitchener and Anthony Jorm in 2001 and has since spread to over 20 additional countries. Established in 2007, MHFA Canada has trained over 250,000 participants throughout the provinces and territories.

More information on MHFA Canada: <http://mhfa.ca/en>

### MHFA Basic

MHFA Basic is intended for adults interacting with adults (18 years and older). This course focuses on the four most common mental health disorders including substance related, mood related, anxiety and trauma related, and psychotic disorders. The course prepares participants to interact confidently about mental health with their family, friends, communities, and workplaces.

### Mental Health First Aid Adaptations

In addition to MHFA Seniors, the MHFA Basic course has been adapted to meet the unique needs of adults who work with youth, First Nations, Inuit, Northern Peoples and the veteran community.

### Mental Health First Aid Seniors

MHFA Seniors supports the mental health of Canada's aging population.

Aims of the training (14 hours over two days):

- Recognize the symptoms of mental health problems or crises as they develop.
- Provide initial help when dealing with a mental health problem or crisis.
- Guide a senior and/or caregiver toward appropriate professional help.
- Provide strategies and resources to support both seniors and their caregivers.

Topics covered:

- Seniors
- Mental Health First Aid
- Substance-related disorders
- Mood-related disorders
- Anxiety and trauma-related disorders
- Dementia
- Delirium
- Psychosis

- Crisis first aid intervention for substance overdose, suicidal behavior, panic attacks, acute stress reaction, psychotic episodes and delirium

#### Who should train in MHFA Seniors?

- Seniors
- Service providers and informal caregivers, including:
  - Spouse/partner
  - Family members
  - Friends and neighbours

More information on MHFA Basic and its adaptations: <http://mhfa.ca/en/course-info/courses>

#### Does MHFA work?

Research has shown that this evidence-based course offers significant positive impacts for participants and their workplaces, communities, and families, namely:

- Significantly greater recognition of the most common mental health problems
- Decreased social distance from people with mental health problems
- Increased confidence in providing help to others
- Improved mental health of the MHFA participant her/himself

Read more about the evidence behind MHFA: <http://cbpp-pcpe.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ppractice/mental-health-first-aid-canada/>

#### MHCC Initiatives on Mental Health in Older Adults

- Seniors mental health advisory committee guided MHCC work (2007-2012)
- Development of the [Guidelines for Comprehensive Mental Health Services for Older Adults in Canada](#) (2011)
- Seniors' mental health recommendations in the [Mental Health Strategy for Canada](#) focused on wellness promotion, education, early intervention and countering age discrimination, as well as better access and coordination of specialty care (2012)
- Anti-stigma workshop for healthcare providers and students on seniors living with a mental health problem or illness (2012)

#### Other MHCC Initiatives on Mental Health in Older Adults in the Early Stages of Development

- Development of a policy paper on mental health considerations in providing home care services to seniors
- Engagement of leading champions and experts to guide the MHCC's work.

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