



## Focus Area: Social Isolation

### Case Study: Senior Reach

Author: Jessica Kirby

## What is Senior Reach?

Senior Reach is an evidence-based program, recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, implemented in communities in three states to provide opportunities of assistance to at-risk older adults.<sup>1</sup> Seniors — those ages 60 or older — accounted for 13% of the overall population in the U.S. in 2012. However, this population is projected to double by 2040.<sup>2</sup>

### How was the initiative created?

The Senior Reach program was created in 2005 through a multi-agency partnership to better serve older adults. The program was initially implemented in Colorado. Senior Reach has achieved proven clinical outcomes that include reductions in depression, anxiety, and social isolation, and increased overall recovery.<sup>3</sup>

The six purposes of Senior Reach are to:

- Identify targeted at-risk older adults
- Assess Community Partner referrals, outreach, and treatment
- Make a positive impact on the lives of older adults referred
- Increase referrals, community support, agency awareness, and exportability
- Develop infrastructure to support Senior Reach
- Implement Senior Reach according to the model to increase likelihood of success<sup>4</sup>

### What population does Senior Reach serve?

Senior Reach intends to identify individuals ages 60 and older who are at higher risk of social isolation due to living alone, loss of family and friends, and other factors and connect them with resources to prevent social isolation and its effects.<sup>5</sup> Promoting dignity and independence in older adult populations is incredibly important to Senior Reach, as too often older adults struggle with the loss of both during the life course.

Senior Reach serves participating communities that have identified older adults who may need emotional or physical support and/or connection to community services.<sup>6</sup> These adults may be experiencing problematic mental and emotional states, personality and physical changes, poor health, social isolation, substance abuse, physical abuse or neglect, and risk factors for suicide.

## How does Senior Reach work?

Senior Reach is designed to support older adults in their well-being, independence, and dignity through a cost-effective and population-based model.<sup>7</sup>

The program operates through community partner volunteers who are trained to observe behaviors in older adults that would indicate their need for help. Once the volunteer alerts the Senior Reach Call Center, a member of the Call Center team will reach out directly to the identified individual. If the individual agrees, a member of the Senior Reach team will do a home visit to determine the services that would provide the greatest support.<sup>8</sup> Services provided through Senior Reach include emotional support, care management, connection to community resources, depression screening and treatment, and identification and early intervention of prescription drug misuse or abuse.<sup>9</sup>

Senior Reach is possible due to strong partnerships among agencies, businesses, and community-minded individuals that bring the program into the community for their older adult populations. The program can be brought into the community by purchasing a license to get local volunteers trained and technical assistance for starting and maintaining the program.

## Benefits of Implementing Senior Reach

- Improving population-based health outcomes for the growing and vulnerable older adult population.
- Increasing utilization of existing community resources through a cost-effective model.
- Increasing community awareness regarding the needs seniors experience related to mental health services.
- Educating trained volunteers on how to make a referral for seniors of concern once needs are identified.
- Succeeding at outreach and connection to the referred older adults with a 93% engagement rate.
- Leaving a positive impact on the lives of Senior Reach participants as 87% of participants reported.
- Reaching over 31,000 individuals to date to increase awareness and education of the needs of aging populations.<sup>11</sup>

The ability to use existing community resources is of substantial benefit to this program. Volunteer groups, existing senior service commu-

## Senior Reach is offered through a three-year license.



nity information and phone lines, behavioral health clinicians, and Local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for care management services can be used to implement Senior Reach in communities where these resources already are available.<sup>12</sup>

### How has state government utilized the program?

The Senior Reach program is currently utilized in a handful of counties in Colorado, Michigan, and Montana.

For example, Michigan launched Senior Reach in 12 communities through a multi-million-dollar

grant from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund. The 12 sites were selected to cover nearly half of Michigan's population.<sup>13</sup> Ottawa County, Michigan, was one of the 12 sites awarded \$241,000 to implement Senior Reach over two years.<sup>14</sup>

While the program is administered only in three states, the model is easily replicable due to the ability to have traditional (clinical) and non-traditional volunteers to refer older adults demonstrating needs and the model is a cost-effective measure to promote prevention and intervention for at-risk older adults.



## Endnotes

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- 1 Senior Reach. [“Sales Booklet.”](#)
- 2 Senior Reach. [“Implementation.”](#)
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [“Lonely Older Adults.”](#)
- 6 Senior Reach. [“Services: What is Senior Reach?”](#)
- 7 Senior Reach. [“Implementation.”](#)
- 8 Senior Reach. [“Services.”](#)
- 9 Community Mental Health Services of Livingston County. [“Senior Reach.”](#)
- 10 Senior Reach. [“Implementation: Licensing Product.”](#)
- 11 Senior Reach. [“Sales Booklet.”](#)
- 12 Senior Reach. [“Sales Booklet.”](#)
- 13 Michigan Health Endowment Fund. (2016, April 15). [Senior reach program kicks off in Michigan.](#)
- 14 Ottawa County. [Community mental health: Senior reach.](#)