
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Aging and mental health in Canada: top 10 unanswered questions according to older adults, caregivers and health and social care providers

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Introduction

There is growing recognition that mental health is an essential part of overall health, yet mental and physical health care delivery and research remain heavily siloed in Canada. Age-related changes such as loss of social roles, retirement, bereavement, physical and cognitive health issues can have a negative impact on mental health, yet greater emphasis is placed on understanding and responding to physical and cognitive care needs of aging Canadians. There is a dearth of information on aging-focused mental health support, care and treatment and a need to form a meaningful aging and mental health research agenda for improved care integration.

Aims Objectives Theory or Methods

This project aimed to meaningfully partner with older adults, family caregivers and health and social care providers to identify the top 10 unanswered research questions on aging and mental health in Canada. A modified James Lind Alliance priority-setting partnership approach was applied, guided by a steering group representing diverse lived experiences. Consultation methods included two national surveys and four online workshops. Consensus-building was guided by qualitative and quantitative data analysis, a rapid literature scan and a nominal group technique.

Highlights or Results or Key Findings

Survey 1 (n=295) was opened-ended and led to the identification of 42 unique questions that Canadians' have about aging and mental health. A rapid literature scan revealed answers to some questions, but 25 were determined to be unanswered by existing evidence. Survey 2 (n=705) asked participants to choose which of the unanswered questions they felt were most important for future research and led to the prioritization of 18 unanswered questions, as selected by participants overall and those in key under-represented groups (age 76+ years, men, non-Caucasian individuals and those living outside of Ontario). Workshop participants (n=52) identified the top 10 unanswered questions through individual reflection and ranking, sharing of stories, small and large group discussion and voting. The top 10 unanswered questions include topics of skill-building, social isolation and loneliness, access to services (awareness, financial, geographical), technology,

person-centred care, provider burnout, care transitions, support for caregivers and shared decision-making.

Conclusions

Partnership with older adults, family caregivers and health and social care providers across Canada led to wide and deep engagement on the topic of aging and mental health. The top 10 unanswered research questions will support an aging-focused mental health research agenda on topics that matter most to Canadians.

Implications for applicability/transferability sustainability and limitations

Most older adults, caregivers and health and social care providers involved in this project are interested in continued partnership to: share the top 10 list widely for increased awareness, funding and collaboration; develop research projects to answer the top 10 questions; and promote action on evidence-based answers to Canadians' questions.