

Promoting Healthy Minds for Older People on World Mental Health Day

The latest WHO World Health Assembly, in May 2013, identified older people as a group with a particular risk of experiencing mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.

There are many things that older people can do to maintain their own health, but there is also a role for decision makers, families and wider society. Actions that could help include

- **Addressing Poverty** - Older people can be more vulnerable to poverty which can increase worry and stress.
- **Improving Awareness**- Mental health issues in older people are often under identified. There is a need to improve the awareness and understanding of conditions, their impact and how they can be treated.
- **Better Access to Support**- While there are many excellent support services in Northern Ireland, older people are often reluctant to seek help. More could be done by everyone to reduce the stigma associated with conditions such as depression and anxiety.
- **Maintaining Strong Relationships**- Being close to families and having good social connections supports older people to maintain an active role in society which in turns improves confidence and self-esteem and leads to a better sense of wellbeing
- **Promoting Opportunities for More Physical Activity**- Increasing physical activity levels has positive effects on the body and mind. Gentle exercise like a walk with friends or an arm chair aerobics can boost energy and positivity.

To mark World Mental Health Day, on Thursday 10 October, Belfast Healthy Cities, the World Health Organization (WHO) body in Northern Ireland is highlighting the importance of good mental wellbeing for people as they grow older.

Joan Devlin, CEO, Belfast Healthy Cities said.

“Supporting Healthy Ageing is a key issue for us, as is the growing burden of disease caused by poor mental health. We believe that by adopting healthy behaviours at an early age, and carrying them through life as we grow older we can begin to address the challenges of mental wellbeing in older people.”

As part of its work with older people, Belfast Healthy Cities is also inviting entries for a special Healthy Ageing Award which is one of six 25th Anniversary Awards being presented to celebrate 25 years of Belfast as a WHO Healthy City and recognise organisations who have contributed to better health and wellbeing in the city. Further information can be obtained from www.belfasthealthycities.com

Further reading

Health 2020: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/health-policy/health-2020-the-european-policy-for-health-and-well-being>

Mental Health and Older People, World Mental Health Day 2013, World Federation for Mental Health <http://www.wfmh.com/2013DOCS/WMHDDay%202013%20final%20doc2.pdf>