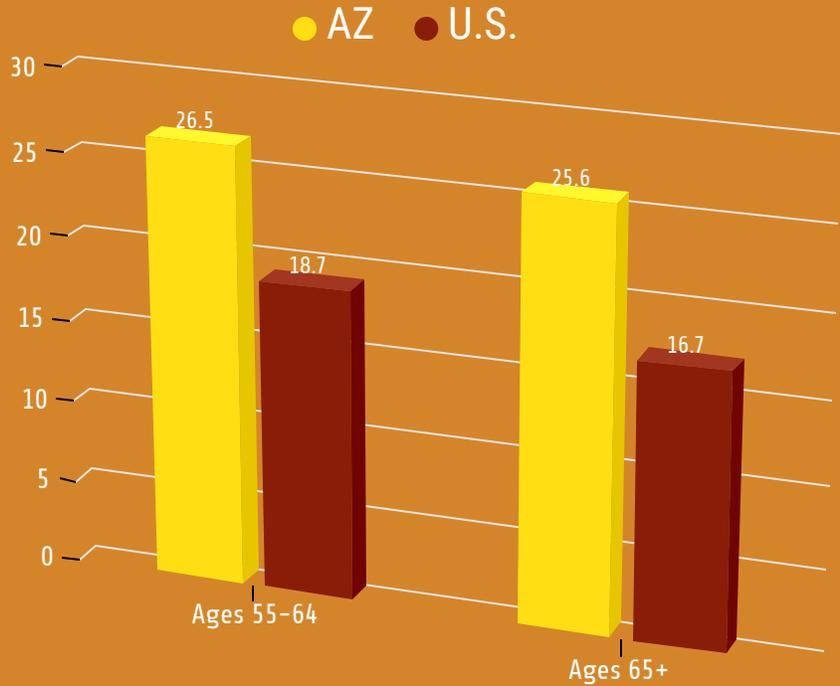




Substance Use & Suicide: Older Adults in Arizona



Age-Adjusted Suicide Mortality Rates
per 100,000 for U.S. and Arizona, 2016



★ The suicide mortality rate for older adults in Arizona is significantly higher than the average suicide mortality rate for older adults in the U.S.

★ The greatest absolute difference in suicide rates between Arizona and the United States occurred for those aged 65 or older (25.6 versus 16.7 per 100,000).

FOR FEMALES IN ARIZONA, THE SUICIDE MORTALITY RATE PEAKED FOR THOSE AGED 55-64 (13.3 PER 100,000).



FOR MALES IN ARIZONA, THE SUICIDE MORTALITY RATE PEAKED FOR THOSE AGED 65 AND OLDER (46.6 PER 100,000).

SUICIDE RISK CONTINUES TO INCREASE WITH INCREASING AGE FOR MALES OVER AGE 65.



The rate among males aged 75-84 was 55.3 per 100,000, and rose to 75.6 per 100,000 among those aged 85 and older.

Source: Arizona Department of Health, Bureau of Public Health Statistics, Population Health and Vital Statistics. (2006-2016) Intentional self-harm (suicide), Arizona, 2006-2016.



Substance Use in the Arizona Older Adult Population

As part of the 2018 Arizona Statewide Substance Use Prevention Needs Assessment, 3 focus groups were conducted with older adults in Tucson, Prescott and Phoenix. Older adults were asked about what current and most harmful substance issues existed in their community, what they thought caused substance use/and or misuse, and what would be effective prevention programming to combat these issues.

Causes of Substance Use and/or Misuse for Older Adults

1

Loneliness and isolation lead to substance use and/or misuse.

Getting into and providing someone with that companionship, that connection with at least one other person... that goes to the heart of preventing any type of substance abuse. (Prescott older adult)

2

Loss of role after retirement leads to substance use and/or misuse.

As a culture we identify so much with our role... [Once people retire], there's a loss of role, whether it's from an office, as a parent or as a grandparent... Role is what determines worth in this culture... and when you lose that there's of course the dependence on something else to alleviate that... (Tucson older adult)

3

Prevention activities are not geared towards older adults, often only youth.

One of the things that is rather discouraging to me in this area [is that there is] very little targeting to older adults... [prevention activities are] all targeted to youth... because I think that's where people's hearts are and there's a belief that if we get them younger, then that's prevention... There's no question in our mind that's there's a need... and that our colleagues and friends and people we work with don't have the information sometimes that they need. (Prescott older adult)

4

Over-prescription of pain medications which can sometimes lead to street drug use when prescription of pain medication becomes more regulated.

I've had several surgeries including oral surgery and every time I've had a procedure, the first thing they do is hand me a script for a narcotic, and I don't take narcotics. I refuse them. But it's automatic each time. And they hand me a script and I have to ask what it is. And then when they tell me what it is, I say I want something else... I think it really is an issue of over-prescription that's happening today. (Tucson older adult)

Substance Use Prevention Recommendations from Older Adults

Focus more on prevention of health problems and opportunities to receive alternative health (i.e., qigong, acupuncture, etc.)

Educate the general public/family/friends so they can be part of the solution

Address social isolation (e.g. more peer support and intergenerational programming)

Educate physicians about older adult substance use issues

Provide older adult-specific education and support that meet older adults' unique needs

This publication was made possible by grant number T1010004 from SAMHSA. The views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services; nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.