

New Grant for BUSSW's CADER Expands State-of-the-Art Behavioral Health Training for Professionals Who Work with Older Adults

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Boston University School of Social Work (BUSSW) [Center for Aging & Disability Education & Research \(CADER\)](#) expands training and evaluation initiatives across the country with the help of a new grant. The one-year, \$115,000 grant from The Retirement Research Foundation (RRF) focuses on workforce training for senior center staff in Florida and Illinois, enabling CADER to expand its innovative training model.

Established in 2002 to strengthen the workforce that provides health and long-term supports to older adults and people with disabilities, CADER, led by Director and BUSSW Research Assistant Professor Bronwyn Keefe, has developed groundbreaking training programs to help providers respond to the specific needs of a rapidly aging population and the changing landscape for health and long-term services.

Cross-Country Reach

Nationally, as the number of older adults increases, so does concern about untreated behavioral health issues. One of the greatest barriers to providing mental health and substance use services is the lack of a trained workforce. In response, CADER developed a targeted online training program for the state Senior Centers, since they are the first line of defense for many older adults, families, and caregivers needing social and support services. The online certificate program is built around key competencies in behavioral health treatment that help workers identify and respond to older adults with mental health and substance use concerns, increase resilience, and further suicide prevention.

Early this year, the program received the Mather Lifeways Promising Practices Award, recognizing innovative approaches in aging well or long-term care and senior living communities.

Following this success, CADER will work with the National Council on Aging's (NCOA) National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) to expand the program to senior center staff in Florida and Illinois.

“Since states do not mandate training or educational programs for senior centers in behavioral health, there is great variation across states and agencies on how to develop the important skills needed to identify mental health, substance use, suicidality, and dementia,” Keefe said. “This project aims to fill that gap and provide evidence-based best practices for training those who care for aging adults.”

In collaboration with NCOA, CADER will also expand its evaluation of the program to include whether senior center staff increased their comfort level and knowledge in referring older adults to mental health services and to gather important lessons or “stories” from the field to help better understand how a well-trained workforce can impact overall well-being for older adults. CADER will use the experiences shared by senior center staff to develop best practices and grow its training toolkit.

“We are excited to work with CADER to expand the availability of this training to senior center staff in Florida and Illinois,” said Maureen O’Leary, NCOA program manager for NISC. “Senior center staff want to be able to support their members’ desires to age well, and increasingly that means being able to answer questions and even provide referrals for mental health services. This pilot is an important step to ensuring they can confidently take action when needed.”