

Wellness Initiative for Senior Education (WISE) Program: An Evidence-based Wellness Program For Older Adults

Empowering older adults to make positive, healthy choices

As more Americans enter their senior years and life expectancies reach record highs, it is more important than ever for seniors to focus on their health and wellbeing. It's critical they recognize the life choices they make and their behaviors can have a significant impact on their quality of life.

Recognizing the unique needs and perspective of seniors, the New Jersey Prevention Network (NJPN) developed the Wellness Initiative for Senior Education (WISE) Program, a six-week, evidenced-based¹ substance use prevention and wellness program. In covering a range of topics from stress management and strategies for healthy living to medication management and prescription drug use, WISE uses an interactive approach to help seniors celebrate aging, make positive lifestyle choices, and feel more confident and in control of their lives.

The WISE Program, developed and widely used in New Jersey since 1996, has reached over 40,000 older adults. The program sessions take place once a week for six weeks. Each session is about two hours in length. Session topics include medication use and misuse, stress management, the aging process, depression, alcohol use disorder and prescription drug misuse.

NJPN provides materials and training to facilitators who take the program to senior centers, houses of worship, community centers, and senior living complexes. Training is offered either as a standard training as scheduled by NJPN in New Jersey, or as a customizable training at an organization's location of choice. The program has been implemented in Alaska, Kentucky, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Nevada, Indiana, Oregon, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Wyoming.

For more information, contact NJPN at 732-367-0611.



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¹WISE has been recognized as an evidence-based prevention program by the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) and Aging and Disability Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (ADEPP). Independent evaluation was conducted by the Institute for Families at Rutgers School of Social Work in New Brunswick, NJ.

Six-lesson Curriculum at a Glance



Lesson One: Understanding the Changes Associated with Aging

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Better understanding of the facts and myths of aging
- ♦ Greater familiarity with the top 10 causes of death in America
- ♦ Enhanced knowledge of what places individuals at risk for premature death and how to avoid these risks
- ♦ Heightened awareness of the risk of depression among seniors

Lesson Two: Aging Sensitivity

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Better understanding of the biological changes associated with aging
- ♦ Greater insight into our own feelings about aging
- ♦ Heightened awareness of the advantages of growing older

Lesson Three: Valuing Cultural and Generational Diversity

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Expanded understanding of the concepts of culture and diversity
- ♦ Improved ability to name our own cultural identifications, how they impact our values and the ways we interact with others
- ♦ Better understanding of the diversity of senior citizens and the unique needs of different types of seniors
- ♦ Heightened awareness of the assumptions people commonly make about various cultural groups and how they impact social interaction

Lesson Four: Medication and the Older Adult

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Increased awareness of the prevalence of medication use among older adults
- ♦ Improved ability to identify behaviors that lead to medication misuse
- ♦ Expanded knowledge of how to manage medication use
- ♦ Greater familiarity with drugs commonly used by older adults, typical adverse reactions to drugs, and age-related changes in how drugs are metabolized
- ♦ Improved ability to relate critical information to health care providers and ask important questions relevant to medication use

Lesson Five: Substance Use, Addiction, and Older Adults

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Increased understanding of addiction as a disease
- ♦ Improved ability to identify the signs of alcohol use disorder among seniors
- ♦ Expanded knowledge of the effects of alcohol and other drug use
- ♦ Greater familiarity with the health risks and treatment options for addiction
- ♦ Improved ability to identify factors that place older adults at risk for substance use disorder and protective factors that can help prevent it

Lesson Six: An Enhanced Quality of Life

Expected Outcomes

- ♦ Greater familiarity with strategies for maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- ♦ Increased awareness of our personal “stress triggers”
- ♦ Heightened awareness of our personal values and how they influence the way we think and act

Key Evaluation Findings

- WISE Program participants increased their knowledge regarding how their bodies age, how the aging process affects their ability to metabolize alcohol and medications, and how to recognize the early signs and symptoms of depression.
- WISE participants were more likely to improve health behaviors related to lifestyle choices, health care empowerment, and use of prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- Seniors who completed the WISE Program reported greater increases in social support over time.

