



TALKING POINTS:

HELPING OLDER ADULTS STAY CONNECTED AND AGE IN PLACE

Helping older adults age in place requires more than services alone. It also means reducing isolation, supporting caregivers, and making sure useful tools and programs can be adapted to fit local communities. These talking points outline promising efforts underway in New York and key opportunities to build on them.

OPENING

- May gives us a meaningful chance to talk about older adult mental health through both Mental Health Awareness Month and Older Americans Month.
- The 2026 Older Americans Month theme, *Champion Your Health*, is a good reminder that mental health is part of health, full stop.
- For rural New York, this conversation should be strengths-based, practical, and hopeful.



KEY MESSAGE 1

- Older adults contribute wisdom, resilience, caregiving, and leadership to rural communities.
- Mental health promotion for older adults is about helping people stay connected, supported, independent, and engaged.



KEY MESSAGE 2

- Rural communities have real strengths that support mental well-being: trusted neighbors, volunteer networks, senior services, local organizations, and community identity.
- The goal is to strengthen those assets and remove barriers like transportation gaps, workforce shortages, and stigma.



KEY MESSAGE 3

- Social connection is not extra. It is a health issue.
- Older adults are at greater risk for social isolation, and social isolation is linked to depression, anxiety, dementia, and earlier death.



KEY MESSAGE 4

- Stigma remains one of the biggest barriers to care for older adults.
- We need to normalize mental health conversations and make it clear that asking for help is a sign of self-awareness and strength, not weakness.



KEY MESSAGE 5

- Rural New York already has important assets, including NYSARH's OARS Program, NY Connects, local Area Agencies on Aging, educational webinars, and community-based supports.
- These are the kinds of trusted access points that can make support easier to find and easier to use.



KEY MESSAGE 6

- New York is also testing promising ideas, including the Virtual Senior Center, NY Caregiver Portal, aging-in-place pilots, and technology-supported companionship tools.
- Innovation matters, but the bigger point is this: older adults in rural communities deserve options, dignity, and connection.

CLOSE

- Supporting older adult mental health in rural New York is not just about treatment.
- It is about the conditions that help people thrive: connection, belonging, transportation, access, trusted relationships, and communities that know how to talk about mental health without shame.



Mother Cabrini
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