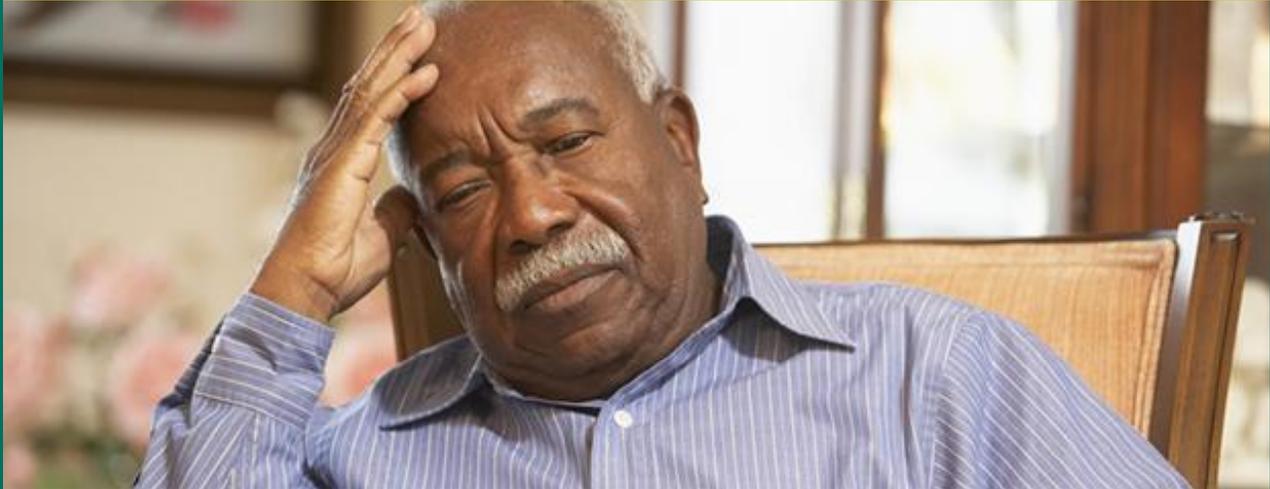


SASH is a caring partnership among Vermont [Nonprofit Housing Providers](#) | [Area Agencies on Aging](#) | [Home Health Providers](#) | [Mental Health Providers](#) | [Vermont Hospitals](#) & Primary Care Providers



## The Perils of Stress in Older Adults

Perhaps it's because of the tax deadline, but April is Stress Awareness Month. According to the [American Institute of Stress](#) (yes, there is such a thing), **90% of visits to primary-care physicians are due to stress disorders**, ranging from stomach issues and headaches to insomnia and heart disease. Over time, these symptoms can contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, anxiety, depression and a host of other conditions, including substance abuse.



**For older people who are already at heightened risk for these illnesses, managing stress is particularly important.** As we (and our cells) age, heart fitness and lung capacity decline, affecting our ability to accommodate the body's natural responses to stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol (e.g., faster breathing, accelerated heart rate and higher blood pressure). Cortisol also causes a rise in blood sugar and reduces the immune system's resistance to infection -- and **women are three times more likely to be affected by an overload of stress hormones** as they age compared to men, according to a study in the journal [Psychoneuroendocrinology](#).

Moreover, studies show that long-term stress damages cells in the hippocampus, the part of the brain packed with receptors for the stress hormone cortisol and responsible for memory storage and retrieval. This can lead not only to depression and other maladies, it can make older adults **more susceptible to Alzheimer's disease**. [A study of 1,278 older adults](#) without such problems over 12 years found that those who began to exhibit mild cognitive impairment due to stress or depression were much more likely to develop Alzheimer's.

## Helping to Relieve Caregiver Stress

[Powerful Tools for Caregivers](#) is a six-session course that helps family caregivers reduce stress, improve self-confidence, communicate their feelings, balance their lives, increase their ability to make tough decisions, and locate helpful resources.

Through collaborations with health and human-service organizations, the program has 4,000+ class leaders in 41 U.S. states and in Canada and Korea who facilitate the series.

One of the leaders in Vermont is SASH partner [Central Vermont Council on Aging](#) (CVCOA), which to date has brought the program to Waterbury and Montpelier and is kicking off a [new series in Barre starting April 19](#). Ninety percent of those attending the agency's previous courses affirmed that the program "increased [their] ability to cope with caregiving." For more information, visit the agency's [website](#) or email [cvcoa@cvcoa.org](mailto:cvcoa@cvcoa.org).



## SASH's Multifaceted Approach to Combating Stress

SASH participants have an advantage when it comes to managing stress because a number of evidence-based, stress-busting programs and activities are ingrained in the program.

- **Anxiety Screenings:** SASH participants are screened at least annually for anxiety using the validated Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) screen. Results help staff plan community-wide programs and inform individual supports in conjunction with our [SASH partners](#).
- **Exercise:** From Tai Chi to walking groups, "Bone Builders" classes and everything in between, SASH regularly offers exercise programs right on site, where people live and gather. Many of these programs are run by our SASH partners in the region, such as the 21 peer-led classes offered by RSVP in the three counties served by [CVCOA](#) (Washington, Lamoille and Orange).



These programs alone provide ongoing wellness and companionship to 359 individuals through the service of 41 volunteer leaders. Recently surveyed about the impact of the classes on their lives, participants overwhelmingly responded that they felt more satisfied with their lives, more confident they could remain living in their own homes and "able to do the things I need to do" and "most of the things I want to" -- all of which have the effect of mitigating stress.

- **Mindfulness Sessions:** In addition to its proven success in relieving stress and inducing relaxation, concentration-meditation techniques such as mindfulness have been [linked to cognitive and psychological improvements in older adults with mild cognitive impairment](#). Mindfulness sessions are a regular offering at SASH sites.
- **Social Activities:** Here again SASH shines. Ongoing get-togethers, outings, guest performances and educational programs take place at SASH sites, making it easy for residents to join in (and difficult to stay isolated). Those who prefer time alone can still count on regular visits and check-ins from their SASH coordinator and wellness nurse.
- **Laughing!** As any SASH participant will tell you, SASH promotes happiness and well-being -- and it's fun! Laughter is a great physical and emotional release that connects us with others and releases the "feel good" hormones known as endorphins.

The latest statistics from the Alzheimer's Association show that the number of Vermonters age 65 and older with Alzheimer's disease is projected to grow nearly 31% by 2025, just seven years from now. Moreover, the organization says that **Alzheimer's is now the sixth leading cause of death in Vermont, and our state has the sixth highest death rate in the U.S. due to Alzheimer's.** Learn more by downloading the [Vermont Alzheimer's fact sheet](#) or reviewing [U.S. and other state data for 2018](#).



## Professional Development Opportunities

Refer to the [statewide SASH Calendar](#) for details about these and other offerings.

- April 24 - **The Power of Planning** (Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging), webinar
- April 24 - **Using SBIRT/Motivational Interviewing** to effectively engage patients with chronic disease and substance-use risks (UVM Health Network), Burlington
- April 28 - **Mental Illness and Recovery Workshop Teacher Training** (NAMI), Williston
- April 28 - **Celebrate World Tai Chi & Qi Gong Day** (Tai Chi Vermont), Shelburne
- April 30 - **Effective use of Motivational Interviewing** to engage and help clients who use marijuana (UVM Health Network), Waterbury
- April 30, May 1, 2, & 3 - **Substance Abuse Prevention Skills Training** (VT Dept. of Health ADAP & SAMHSA), 5 hour online prior to 4 days in person in Waterbury
- May 1 - **Effective use of Motivational Interviewing** to engage and help clients who use marijuana (UVM Health), Rutland
- May 8, 9, 15 & 16 - **Chronic Disease Self-Management Program Leader Training** (UVM Health Network), St. Johnsbury
- May 10 - **Scattered: ADHD Across the Lifespan** (Howard Center's Spring Community Education Series), Burlington
- May 18 - **Fresh Start Leader Training** (UVM Health Network), Burlington
- May 22 - **Opiates: Scientific, Political & Social Perspectives** (Howard Center), Burlington
- May 27 - **Older Adult Legal Issues** (V4A), Webinar

## SASH Online Resources

**Referral Forms & Contact List:** Visit [sashvt.org/connect](http://sashvt.org/connect).

**Training information, Staff Tools & Resources:** Visit the [Forum](#).

**SASH Job Opportunities:** See [positions available statewide](#).



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SUPPORT AND SERVICES AT HOME

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