

PEARLS: COACHING FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH DEPRESSION

Many older people living in the United States are in the grips of a mental health crisis, their struggles compounded by loneliness, isolation, and grief in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For more than 20 years, the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives (PEARLS) has brought its one-on-one, skill-based intervention for depression to older people in their own homes or communities.

OVERVIEW

- ▶ PEARLS is a skill-building program that helps older adults manage and reduce feelings of isolation and depression.
- ▶ PEARLS is administered by trained coaches who work at community-based organizations. Coaches need not have previous counseling experience or clinical training.
- ▶ The standard PEARLS intervention consists of six to eight one-hour sessions over four or five months.
- ▶ PEARLS expands access to care among older adults, particularly those who may find getting help extremely difficult. This may be because they cannot afford mental health care, cannot locate bilingual and bicultural providers, or cannot receive help in under-resourced areas. In addition, persistent, systemic racism and historical trauma may [exclude people from needed care](#).
- ▶ Potential participants are screened for depression symptoms but are not required to have a formal diagnosis to participate in PEARLS.

IMPACT

- ▶ More than one in five older adults reports symptoms of depression and/or anxiety, according to an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data collected in December 2022. ([Source: KFF](#))
- ▶ Older adults who participated in PEARLS were three times as likely to significantly reduce their symptoms of depression as those who did not participate. They also reported greater improvements in well-being and were less likely to be hospitalized. ([Source: JAMA](#))
- ▶ More than one in three adults over 45 feels lonely; about a quarter of adults over 65 are considered socially isolated. Older adults are at increased risk because they are more likely to live alone, experience the loss of family and friends, and have chronic illnesses, including hearing loss. ([Source: National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine; CDC](#))
- ▶ Older adults who participated in PEARLS reported feeling more socially connected, less isolated, and less lonely. ([Source: PEARLS](#))
- ▶ PEARLS has reached more than 12,800 older adults, via over 200 organizations, in 35 states. ([Source: PEARLS](#))

TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Learn about providing PEARLS in [in your community](#).
- ▶ [Contact](#) the PEARLS team.
- ▶ Read [personal stories](#) from PEARLS participants and coaches.
- ▶ Read more about the [evidence](#) behind PEARLS.