

Alcohol abuse has become a “public health crisis” in America and over the past 10 years among senior citizens there has been a 107% increase in “alcohol use disorder,” according to research sponsored by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

A major problem is that alcohol abuse by older persons is often overlooked by clinicians because the effects of alcoholism, for example cognitive decline and personality changes, are often attributed to “just getting old.” Even with fractures 4X more prevalent among alcoholics than in the general population, alcohol abuse is still missed as the possible cause of falls among the elderly.

Older alcohol abusers often minimize and/or lie about their drinking, the amount they drink, and how often they drink. Idle days, loneliness, “happy hour” in retirement communities, health and money worries; all these can contribute to problem drinking. And it’s important not to forget the danger posed by combining alcohol with the prescribed medications many elderly take.

Alcohol abuse among the baby boomers can be invisible but the consequences are not. If an older friend, family member or neighbor is abusing alcohol, there is help. In Hawaii Alcoholic Anonymous, the Cooperation with the Elder Community committee is active and reaches out to the senior.

Mare L  
District 11  
Area 17