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# CONNECTIONS

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## **UNLOCKING MENTAL HEALTH FOR THE ELDERLY**

### **How Geriatric Psychiatry Has Evolved**

Geriatric psychiatry is a specialized field dealing with the mental health of elderly individuals. As life expectancy and the world population increase over time, the number of Australians over 65 is projected to grow significantly in the coming years (Australia life expectancy 1950-2023). Because of this, geriatric psychiatry's importance isn't going away anytime soon.

Mental health issues are a common concern among the elderly population and directly impact their well-being and quality of life. But for many, caring for their mental health is a relatively foreign concept. This article will speak to how geriatric care has changed and how advancements in geriatric psychiatry enable healthcare professionals to meet this vulnerable population's needs better.

### **Understanding the Demands**

Elderly individuals with mental health disorders face unique challenges that require specialized care. As people age, they're more likely to experience age-related developments that impact their mental health. These developments can include physical or cognitive decline, loneliness, and grieving the loss of loved ones. Common mental health conditions in the elderly include depression, anxiety, dementia, and bipolar disorder. Older adults also frequently face age-related discrimination and stigma, adding to their mental burden and making it difficult for them to access appropriate mental care.

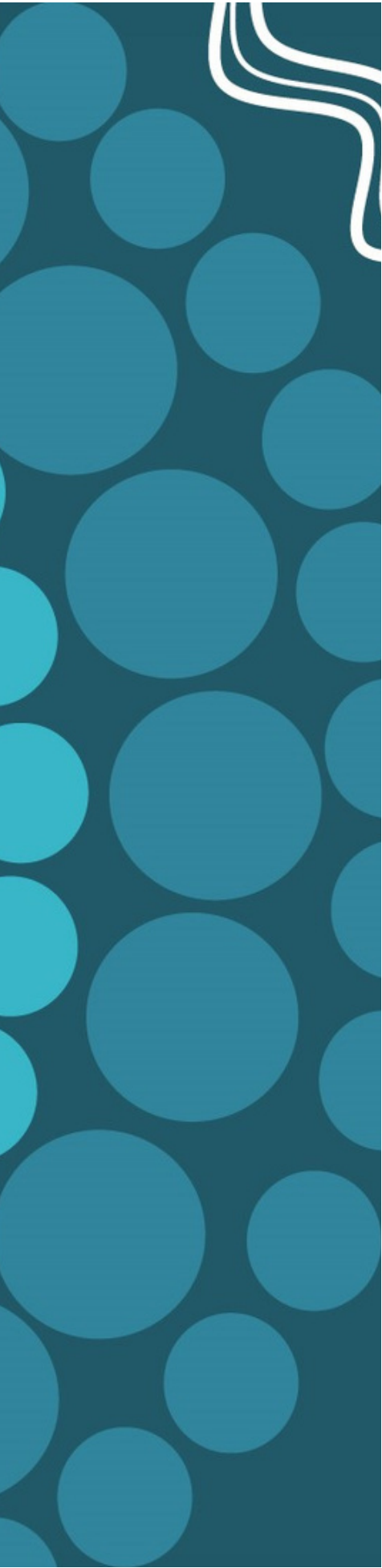
## **Geriatric Psychiatry in the 21st Century**

Traditionally, geriatric psychiatry has focused on the use of psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, and other forms of treatment to address mental health concerns in the elderly. In recent years, geriatric psychiatry has undergone significant changes to better meet the population's needs. One of the most significant changes has been the adoption of technology and telemedicine. Telemedicine allows geriatric psychiatrists to reach elderly individuals in remote or underserved areas, providing them with access to care they may not have had otherwise.

Telemedicine also makes it easier for elderly individuals to receive treatment from the comfort of their own homes. This garners the added benefit of convenience and makes attendance easier for those who have mobility issues that prevent them from getting to in-person appointments. Telehealth also reduces exposure to COVID-19, which is particularly important for the elderly population, who are more susceptible to severe disease (Sivakumar et al., 2020).

## **Addressing Barriers to Care**

As mentioned above, limited access to care due to location, physical mobility, and risk of contracting COVID-19 all create barriers to care for the elderly—But they're not the only barriers. Financial challenges, Social stigma surrounding mental health, and a lack of awareness about available services also play a role.



Geriatric psychiatrists advocate for their current and future clients by partnering with community organizations and healthcare providers to promote awareness about the importance of mental health for the elderly. These practitioners have become more than just prescribers. Now, they're advocates. They may spearhead or promote targeted outreach programs that provide education for older adults and the services available to them.

### **A Wraparound Care Approach**

Geriatric psychiatry is a complex field requiring collaboration between healthcare professionals from different disciplines to encapsulate a client's needs fully. Geriatric psychiatrists may consult with general practitioners, mental health support specialists, physical therapists, and other healthcare professionals for the most comprehensive treatment approach.

This wraparound care is especially important for the elderly, whose mental health issues are frequently exacerbated by physical health issues. Older adults experiencing cognitive decline may develop Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. When part of an interdisciplinary team of providers, a geriatric physician can connect their clients and their families and caretakers with appropriate resources.

## Conclusion

The geriatric psychiatry field has taken strides to better serve its client base. Providers have shifted and expanded their roles in order to address barriers to care and meet the needs of a vulnerable population. But the work is not done. The continued demographic shift toward an aging population demands that psychiatrists continue their innovations.

Interdisciplinary collaboration has emerged as a critical component in the development of the geriatric psychiatry field. By working together and leveraging new technologies and approaches, those who serve the elderly can help ensure top-of-the-line mental healthcare so older adults can live healthy, fulfilling lives.

## References

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## NEW SPECIALISTS IN FOCUS

MARCH 2023



### DR ATTUR

DR ATTUR IS A DEDICATED PROFESSIONAL WHO HAS MORE THAN 15 YEARS OF SPECIALIST EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS, HELPING THEM WITH VARIOUS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.

HIS AREAS OF INTEREST INCLUDE WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH ASD AND NEURODEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES.



### DR SHORT

DR JULIAN SHORT IS A HIGHLY EXPERIENCED PSYCHIATRIST WITH A SPECIAL INTEREST IN DEPRESSION, RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING AND MANAGING LOW SELF-ESTEEM.

DR SHORT HAS BEEN A PRACTISING PSYCHIATRIST FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS.



### DR BAE

DR JAMES BAE IS A GENERAL ADULT AND FORENSIC PSYCHIATRIST BASED IN SYDNEY.

HE HAS A SPECIAL INTEREST IN SPORT PSYCHIATRY, ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHIATRY AND PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY. HE IS A PUBLISHED AUTHOR IN PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY.



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