Learner Objectives
As a result of participation in this program, participants will be able to:

- Understand key issues relating to depression in later life
- Learn about signs of depression in later life
- Explore specific strategies for managing depression in later life
- Gain knowledge of specific resources to deal with depression in later life

Lesson Planning
- Study and learn the information and ideas presented in the organizational materials.
- Decide what you wish to present to your intended audience.
- Plan a lesson introduction, which may include a suggested activity or your own ideas.
- Make copies of the presentation materials or handouts that you will need.

Handouts
Materials to be made available can include:

- Facilitators Guide - for the individual providing the instruction
- Evaluation - one per participant

Time Schedule
Introduction (5 to 10 minutes)
- Invite a local counselor, mental health professional or medical doctor to share briefly about resources for depression in the community. Have the person stay to answer questions if desired.
- Invite a local mental health professional to do a brief depression screening for participants.
- Walk through the first few slides of the lesson, which list three “True or False” questions about depression. Discuss the answers and thoughts of the group.

Presentation of Key Concepts and Lesson (5 to 10 minutes each)
- Depression in Later Life
- How Can I Help?
- Seeking Treatment and Support for Depression

Lesson Review and Program Evaluation (5 to 10 minutes)
Key Concepts – 
Understanding Depression in Later Life

Introduce yourself and welcome the participants. Briefly identify the lesson topic. Ask participants to introduce themselves.

If planned, take a few minutes to begin with one of the suggestions for an introduction outlined in the Facilitators Guide (e.g., brief outline of community resources from a local professional. Have the person stay for a Question and Answer session).

Go through the lesson objectives so participants can form some expectations.

Lesson Objectives

• Understand key issues relating to depression in later life
• Learn about signs of depression in later life
• Explore specific strategies for managing depression in later life
• Gain knowledge of specific resources to deal with depression in later life

To stimulate discussion, ask the participants to respond to this “True or False” statement:

• Depression only develops when someone has had a major traumatic experience in life, such as the death of a spouse or a heart attack.

Note: The answer is False.

Explain the answer to the statement is “false” and that depression does not occur only when people experience major trauma in life.

Ask participants to suggest some of the factors they think might contribute to depression in later life. Discuss the reality that depression is a commonly occurring mental health condition and that it may arise due to a variety of factors, including genetic influences, body changes, life stress, personal losses or other influences.

To stimulate discussion, ask the participants to respond to this “True or False” statement:

• Individuals dealing with depression usually can overcome it if they just work to cheer themselves up or pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

Note: The answer is False.
Slide 6

Explain the answer to the statement is “false” and that depression typically does not improve by telling yourself to feel better or pulling yourself up alone.

Assist participants to understand that depression is a complex medical and mental health condition that typically involves a variety of approaches to treatment, including therapeutic support, social support from others, exercise, diet, rest and medication. Among these, support and understanding from others is very important.

Slide 7

To stimulate discussion, ask the participants to respond to this “True or False” statement:

- Seeking assistance from a doctor or mental health professional for depression is a sign of inability to handle your problems or personal weakness.

Note: The answer is False.

Slide 8

Explain the answer to the statement is “false” and that depression does not mean a person is emotionally weak or unstable or that seeking help is a sign of weakness.

Discuss with participants the reality that depression is a condition anyone can experience. Famous examples include Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt. Children often are wise in seeking help. Adults should understand that seeking assistance from competent professionals often is necessary and signals maturity, wisdom, understanding and strength.

Slide 9

Key Concepts – Depression in Later Life

Depression is an important condition to understand because it affects a significant number of people and can have severe consequences. For example, it may disturb a person’s thoughts and feelings, alter a person’s behavior, and cause physical difficulty and emotional distress. However, depression can be treated effectively when diagnosed.
Individuals attending the session may have experienced depression or known others who have done so. Discuss some of the factors that may raise the risk of depression for aging community members, such as living alone, having no relatives or friends nearby, or experiencing recent losses. Sharing such possibilities and insights can enable greater awareness of this condition.

**Slide 11**

Depression is a mental health condition characterized by an inability to concentrate; insomnia; loss of appetite; physical tiredness or fatigue; feelings of extreme sadness, guilt, helplessness and hopelessness; and thoughts of despair, discouragement and death. It also is called clinical depression.

**Prevalence:** 3.8 percent of people over age 55 residing independently in the community suffer from major depression in any given year.

**Slide 12**

Depression usually is marked by a variety of symptoms occurring together during a period of more than two weeks. Occasional episodes of fatigue, discouragement or anxiety are common for all individuals. However, when a wider array of symptoms develops and lasts longer than two weeks, then clinical depression may occur.

Discuss the different symptoms of depression as a group.
Anxiety is a condition that often accompanies depression. Anxiety is marked by intense mental worry or confusion that becomes debilitating. If a person experiences anxiety, carrying out basic tasks or functioning in a social setting can become difficult for him or her.

Anxiety often is indicated by physical signs such as shortness of breath, increased heart rate, dry mouth and sweating. If an individual is experiencing anxiety, what are some things that participants might do to assist them?

Discuss ways you might help someone who is experiencing much anxiety (get them in a familiar setting, sit and breathe regularly, etc.).

As with depression, a variety of risk factors contribute to the possibility of experiencing anxiety. Previous encounters with depression or anxiety, chronic illness, substance abuse and social isolation are personal factors that increase the likelihood of anxiety.

An awareness of risk factors for anxiety can help individuals be more sensitive to what they or others might be experiencing.

Knowing the signs of depression or anxiety is valuable in being able to get help if needed or provide assistance to others. Ask participants if they ever have discussed the signs of depression with another person.

The information that follows is helpful in understanding signs of depression or anxiety and how to help yourself or others.
Some signs of depression may appear in the physical appearance of an individual. Depression results in physical fatigue and diminishes motivation. As a result, at times you may find an older person dealing with depression who has not bathed or washed clothing, gives little attention to clothing or appearance, has lost or gained significant weight or struggles with lack of sleep.

Another aspect of a person's life that may display signs of depression is his or her emotional state. An older person dealing with depression may act anxious or nervous, be suspicious or blaming of others, act in an angry or irritable manner, be subject to rapid mood changes, make statements such as "no one cares what I do" or "leave me alone," and reflect a sense of hopelessness or discouragement.

The personality of an individual is another aspect of life that is affected by depression. Signs to watch for in this area include decreased social contact with others, lack of care for oneself, limited eye contact, constant preoccupation with losses or health concerns or life challenges, lack of interest in hobbies or family members or friends and difficulty in making personal decisions, even in small matters.

Be attentive to the living conditions of an older person and what might reflect depression. Some signs of depression might be walks or lawns that are left without care; neglect of pets or other animals; little or no food in the home; neglect of surroundings, such as dishes or trash; neglect of gardens or home; or limited involvement with others outside the home.

Be careful to note the difference between signs of depression and what may occur due to physical difficulty or other challenges.
Slide 22

How do you help someone who you feel is struggling with depression or anxiety?

Discuss the points in the slide. At first, a person may not welcome efforts to provide assistance or support. Being patient and caring in such situations is important. Making more than one effort to get someone help if it is needed may be necessary.

Slide 23

Some of the positive factors that protect someone from depression or limit its difficulty include:

- Effective clinical care and treatment
- Family, community and professional support
- Healthy living practices
- Skills in problem solving and stress management

Slide 24

Key Concepts – Seeking Treatment and Support for Depression

Understanding the steps associated with getting treatment and support for depression is helpful. Many people do not seek help because of the stigma associated with mental health concerns. In general, the beginning point for many people is to discuss concerns with a primary-care physician or general-health practitioner.

Slide 25

Individuals in later life may be reluctant to seek assistance or support for a variety of reasons. Identifying barriers to assistance for a particular individual may be important.

If you have identified barriers that stand in the way of access to mental health support and treatment for you or someone you know, take steps to reduce the barriers and get assistance.
Slide 26

Discuss the suggestions listed in slides 26 to 28 relative to sharing your concerns about depression or anxiety. Explore how you might take action or approach an individual with each of these suggestions.

This may be a time to involve a Question and Answer session with a local mental health professional or physician.

Slide 27

Sharing Your Concerns

- Be consistent and patient in your expression of concern without exerting undue pressure.
- Be direct, treat the individual as an adult.
- Give specific examples of behaviors that concern you.
- Use statements such as “I am concerned about you.”

Slide 28

Sharing Your Concerns

- Be prepared with referral information.
- Don’t be discouraged if the person is not ready to accept your assistance.
- Don’t worry if you don’t say things perfectly. What’s important is your message of concern is conveyed and your willingness to help is expressed.
- Encourage a person to get professional assistance from a primary care doctor, mental health professional or other trusted professional source.

Slide 29

Identify some of the resources and information available on depression in later life, such as the North Dakota Mental Health and Aging Education Project.

Encourage participants to fill out the program evaluation form and share it with the program facilitator, who will return it to the local county office of the NDSU Extension Service.