

Guess 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.

Even though the study does not cite causes of the increase, it is obvious that “baby boomers” are either continuing their long-standing drinking behavior or they’re going back to it after retirement.

A major problem is that alcohol abuse by elderly 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 being 4X more prevalent among alcoholics than in the general population, alcohol abuse is still missed as the possible cause of falls among the elderly.

Like most alcoholics, elderly alcohol abusers often minimize and lie about their drinking, the amount they drink, and how often they drink. Retirement community “Happy Hour,” idle days, loneliness, health and money worries ... all these can contribute to problem drinking ... and add to that the danger of combining alcohol with the prescription medications many elderly take.

Alcohol abuse among the elderly can be invisible but the resulting desperation, depression and tragedy is not.

There is help available. Many Hawaii districts have Cooperation with the Elder Committee chairs. They are working hard to help more meetings become senior friendly, assess the need for senior meetings, and have literature specifically for seniors. Spread the word. Mahalo.