

ADRC Monthly TA Call – Online Assessment Tools
March 1, 2007

Moderator: Lisa Alecxih, The Lewin Group
Speakers: Linda Velgouse, Administration on Aging
Krista Boston, Minnesota ADRC
Bill Hodge, National Council on Aging

Announcements: Streamlining Access Peer Workgroup Call next Thursday at 2:30
Pilot Sites Peer Workgroup Call March 15th at 2:30 EDT.
Evaluation Peer Workgroup Call is March 22nd at 2:30 EDT.

The CMS New Freedom Initiative Conference is next week in Baltimore. The ADRC on Monday evening will have a poster session – look for us there. I also know that some of you are going to the ASA-NCOA joint conference in Chicago on “Let’s Rethink Aging,” and we look forward to seeing you there.

The purpose of today’s call is to entice you all to explore the available tools on the website. There is a link on the call page to another resource page on Online Decision Tools. It’s organized into national tools and locality-specific tools – some of which were developed under ADRC initiatives. There are other long term care tools available as well. We’re lucky to have three presenters today to talk about four of the different tools:

Linda Velgouse, from the Administration on Aging will be talking about the National Clearinghouse for Long Term Care Information. Krista Boston from Minnesota will be covering MinnesotaHelp.info’s Long Term Care Choices, which was developed under the ADRC Grant. Bill Hodge from the National Council on Aging who’s going to talk about two tools that NCOA has developed – the Medicare.gov Long Term Planning Tool, and the other is Benefits CheckUp.

Linda Velgouse: A quick background for those of you who might not know - The National Long Term Care Clearinghouse was mandated by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. It mandated that a long term care clearinghouse to provide objective information about the planning and financing of long-term care. It is part of the broader “Own Your Future” Long Term Care Awareness Campaign. The Own Your Future campaign has been run in several states and consists of letters mailed from the state governor’s office to every resident between the ages of 45 and 65. The letters encourage recipients to plan ahead for their long-term care needs and to send away for a Planning Kit that will provide objective information about coverage, eligibility, etc and to visit the website.

In developing the site, we had to be very careful about providing objective information to people about planning, providing contact information for additional objective resources, and really trying to educate consumers on providing state-specific information on coverage, eligibility, and state Medicaid partnership programs.

We gave a lot of thought to providing a website that is simple and easy to use. That is simple - we made sure that it was easy to read through and understand. We used segmented sections so all information wasn't presented at once. There are three main sections - one is a basic 'understanding long-term care' that looks at some of the definitions and some of the risks. Another is for services and providers - you'll see home and community-based services and facility-based services.

We tried to overlap - you can get a capsule view of long-term care by looking here, but a lot of the information is repeated in certain ways in other sections. There is fluidity and repetition among sections. Like for instance - "who pays for long-term care?" A prevailing myth is that Medicare does, but that's incorrect. So in each section you'll see information about costs.

There are a variety of simple and easy-to-use tools available on the site, and users also have the option of ordering a CD for more information. Also included are personal stories and vignettes as examples to help people understand the information presented.

Now costs - again, there are such myths, as many of you know, about who pays for long-term care that we tried to do things like have a planning section that directs you right to public programs and private financing.

Another feature is the Planning IQ Test, an interactive quiz to help walk people through the thinking process. After a user submits their answers, they get feedback that will help them begin or continue to plan. A final feature is the Long Term Care Savings Calculator. A user can put in their state and their age, and the calculator gives an average cost of LTC services in that area against a projected personal savings contribution that the user can adjust to determine how much they should be putting aside for long term care. Basically, long-term care is a lot more expensive than people think.

Another area provides a click-able map by state shows people a variety of long-term care costs specific to their area that they may not have been aware of. A glossary is provided, also links to other ".gov" sites with resources people can use. There are constant prompts to order a Long Term Care planning kit, and an option to leave feedback on the site. We will be continuing to build and refine the site in the future, as well.

That is basically the site, and the things you should be thinking about if you know someone who may have these needs. As you use the site, please provide us feedback about good or bad things about the site as well as other things you might like to see added. You can email me directly at Linda.velgouse@aoa.hhs.gov

Krista Boston, MN: This is MinnesotaHelp.info has been online since 2001. It is our statewide database for information and assistance for persons of all ages. It began as a strategy to implement a long term care database, but it grew over time as more populations wanted to be included, and the ADRC brought the opportunity to expand

it. The Long Term Care Choices Tool is a major feature. The tool has been out since last May. It took three years to build, incorporating lots of feedback. It also took the vendor a long time to produce it.

The new MinnesotaHelp.info will launch in the spring. We've been redesigning based on feedback from our users, and has been designed to operate much like Google. You will see the 'Start A Search' button. There is one tool for seniors, another for youth, and another for people who need help immediately, the homeless, etc. We're very excited about it and we've had a lot of input into it.

This is the Long Term Care Choices tool – that in the future will be under the Senior Link section of MinnesotaHelp. To begin the process, there is a lot of information in the tool that pushes people toward home and community-based services. For example, there is text that pops up and says “You can't just check yourself into a nursing home in Minnesota – you have to be screened and assessed first, so you should look at home and community-based services.”

The first thing you do is to input personal information to create a profile. You can identify whether you are creating a plan for yourself, a parent, a client, etc. You select their gender and their ZIP code. The tool is now customized and will say things like “your mother needs...” rather than “you.”

This section was developed by Dr. Kane at the Center for Aging at University of Minnesota. It has 21 questions, and if you answer the question you'll get a set of recommendations based on information collected from a survey of 200 gerontologists and other experts. I encourage you all to try it.

On the left side of the page, the tool is broken into topic areas or “life domains” that are based on IADLs and ADLs. They are all a part of the process of making decisions about long-term care. The user answers questions about each. At the end of every section, there is an informational blurb about the topic as well as a list of resources, which have been tailored to the needs identified with by the questions in the tool. Services are locality-specific. The user can select any service and add it to the individual plan as they go along. This process repeats in each section. The end result is a compilation of tips, other sites, and documents that are pertinent to the user.

The last page identifies the availability of a Long Term Consultation Service for the single point of entry system in Minnesota. Because I selected that I was a caregiver, there are additional resources to help me self-identify with that role and provide support. There is also a page about how to start a conversation about long-term care needs with a loved one – a concern that is becoming more and more prevalent.

At the very end, the customized plan compiles into a PDF file that can be saved and printed, along with the resources the user has selected. Where are we going from here? We're developing a similar tool is in development for people with disabilities who are younger than 65 with our ADRC continuation funding. The site averages 900 users per month – it's reaching a broader audience than we even intended. Questions?

Linda Velgouse: Is there criteria for which services you list on your site?

Krista Boston: Yes, there are inclusion/exclusion criteria for the entire database. It has roughly 30,000 services for people of all ages, and roughly 12,000 for the elderly. We keep services from nonprofits, government services, and for-profit services that tend to serve our clients well. What that means is that we're not going to put in every elder law practitioner, because we could never keep track, so we link to the Minnesota Bar Association. However, we are going to put in all of the licensed home care agencies.

Todd Coffey, CO: For those questions people answer, do you have an aggregate database that records those so you can run reports on that data?

Krista Boston: We don't gather all of that information, in particular our data privacy notice tells people that we're not storing that information – with the disclaimer that we want to develop the capability for a consumer to send their data to the county via a secure FTP so they don't have to tell their story more than once. We would have to keep that data once that's in place, but right now we're not confident about the security. It will be interesting to see what choices people make, but we haven't gone down that road yet.

Bill Hodge: Quite a few of you are probably already familiar with the National Council on Aging's Benefits Checkup website. We've worked specifically with the ADRC projects in Arizona and Washington state. Benefits CheckUp is an eligibility screening tool that screens for about 1450 federal and state programs, as well as prescription assistance programs that are provided by the pharmaceutical companies. For any given state, there are probably 60-70 programs that individuals may be eligible for. This was designed by NCOA, so it is focused on adults 50 and over, but there are many programs that aren't age-based.

The public can access the site at www.benefitscheckup.org – a separate edition for organizations has the same functionality. The first option is to apply for the Medicare ExtraHelp application. It can be completed and filed with the Social Security Administration directly from this site. After that submission, the tool runs an additional screen on the information to let the user know what other things he or she may be eligible for.

There is a comprehensive questionnaire that screens against all programs in the database. There is also a questionnaire that is specific to prescription assistance. It was specifically designed to be easy for older people to go through on their own. The tool asks for ZIP code, about the programs a person is already enrolled in, the composition of the household, and so on. The last questions are financial, about income and assets. For many older people, especially the very poor, these programs will help them survive later in life.

For all programs there will be an explanation, and most programs on the site have an additional fact sheet available as well. The fact sheet will have contact information for

local offices, eligibility rules, et cetera. A user can print out and mail applications for other programs besides Medicare ExtraHelp. There is an option to jump to right to the application forms for an individual state, or a single program if the user is looking for something specific. You can also search the prescription drug programs by a specific medication. Under “Apply for Benefits” we also have forms for most Medicaid programs, Medicare savings programs, and so on.

In the Organizational Edition that many of your agencies are using, your agency will sign in and all of the functionality of Benefits CheckUp is available on the page. One of the nice things here is that there is a single-page version of the questionnaire, so if you’re helping a lot of people through the process you can answer everything on a single page.

There will be an NCOA booth at the conference in Chicago next week, we’d love to see any of you. Are there any questions? If you’re interested in learning more, you can email us at support@benefitscheckup.org

The other tool I was mentioning is on www.medicare.gov/longtermcare. There is a whole variety of tools here for long-term care planning. In some ways, it’s similar to the tool that is on the AoA site. Again, this tool looks at your current situation and helps you plan for the future.

Krista Boston: How do you maintain your data?

Bill Hodge: Excellent question. The eligibility rules for those 1400 programs are maintained by staff full-time. We have contacts with the government and other agencies who notify us of any changes and we change it right away. We try to keep it as up to date as possible.

Lisa Alecxih: One clarification: Bill had commented that the information on Medicare.gov is similar to that on the AoA site, but the Medicare.gov site is much more oriented to people who are in need of long-term care *today*, and the tool that Linda described is more for people who may need it in the future and how to plan for that.

Thanks, and we’ll talk to you next month.