

OPTIONS COUNSELING

What is Long-Term Support Options Counseling? Long-Term Support Options Counseling is an interactive **decision-support** process whereby consumers, family members and/or significant others are supported in their deliberations to determine appropriate long-term care choices in the context of the consumer's needs, preferences, values, and individual circumstances.¹ Promoting informed decisions about long-term care and supports represents a major goal of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs). ADRCs have a unique opportunity to meet people at times of critical decision-making and change in their lives. Options counseling could occur when an individual has immediate or short range long-term care or support needs and in a variety of settings. Options counseling might be provided to an individual who wants to remain at home but needs supports to do so, after someone has been admitted a long-term care facility following a hospital stay, or when a family caregiver needs help to continue providing care in the community.

How is options counseling different than what we do now? Depending on your individual organization, options counseling may not be that different from the type of support that you currently provide to individuals and their families faced with decisions about long-term care and supports. It is important to keep in mind that it is about **decision support** and **counseling**. Many grantees have reported that providing options counseling is a longer process and takes more time than traditional information and assistance services. Average call times have increased and many ADRCs feel options counseling should occur in a face to face interaction such as a home visit and include family members as well as the individual consumer.

What are other ADRC grantees doing in this area? 86% of ADRC pilot sites report offering options counseling as a key function. Many have developed job descriptions for counselors and some sites designate staff devoted exclusively to providing options counseling. I&R staff, staff who conduct pre-admission screening for nursing homes, or conduct comprehensive assessments for LTC services are also involved in providing options counseling in some sites. On average, grantees report that five percent of contacts result in options counseling.² However, anecdotal evidence indicates that the delivery of options counseling is probably underreported by ADRCs. Many sites are still developing practice protocols and definitions that will help them increase their capacity in provide and track options counseling. Eventually, the ADRC Technical Assistance Exchange plans to work with ADRCs across the country to develop a common set of standards and protocols.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Options counseling is a process, not an event and may include multiple contacts. **Deliberation** and **counseling** are critical components. Relationship building to establish trust and to listen and understand individuals' preferences and needs is essential in delivering quality options counseling.

¹ "Long-Term Support Options Counseling: Decision Support in ADRCs" available: <http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=TAELIssueBriefs>

² "ADRC Outcomes Spring 2007"

- It may require “dosing” out information. Some say information is freedom, but too much at once can be overwhelming and may muddle decision making.
- Having qualified options counselors at the ADRC may include training existing staff or hiring new staff to ensure counselors have appropriate decision support skills.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Long-Term Support Options Counseling: Decision Support in ADRCs. This paper produced by National Association of State Units on Aging serves to begin the discussion about what it means to offer options counseling at ADRCs. A brief survey of ADRC grantees in 2005 revealed diverse approaches in practice, delivery, and definition of options counseling. The paper differentiates options counseling from long-term care choices education and futures planning.
<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=TAEIssueBriefs>

Measuring Options Counseling. This document, developed by the TAE facilitated ADRC grantee Evaluation Peer Work Group in July and September of 2006, provides a chart outlining some goals of options counseling, expected outcomes, indicators, and evaluation strategies.
<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=PreviousEvaluationPeerWorkGroupCalls>

Concurrent Workshop C: Options Counseling ADRC Style. This presentation from the ADRC Grantee National Meeting in Washington, DC in July of 2007 summarizes definitions of options counseling, choices education, and futures planning. It also describes common options counseling scenarios and topics of discussion using Wisconsin as a model.
<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=July2007MtgMaterials>

Wisconsin's Options Counseling Toolkit consists of an introductory video, 16 web-casts, and a communication module with practice scenarios.
<http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-index.php?page=WisconsinPage>
<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/aging/training.htm>