



Core Competencies of Options Counseling: Following-up

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 The Technical Assistance Exchange (TAE) has worked with states implementing options counseling in their Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) programs to identify six core competencies of options counseling that should underpin the process:

- 1) Determining the need for options counseling;
- 2) Assessing needs, values and preferences;
- 3) Understanding and educating about public and private sector resources;
- 4) Facilitating self-direction / self-determination;
- 5) Encouraging future orientation; and
- 6) Following-up.

This series of handouts details some key considerations for program planners and managers and key staff involved in options counseling. The information is based on current practices in the field, and will continue to evolve as more ADRCs develop robust options counseling programs. Over the next year, the Administration on Aging (AoA) will be working with a group of states to develop national standards for options counseling, and this work will also impact and contribute to these concepts.

This handout discusses strategies and resources for following up. Please let us know if you have comments, suggestions, or questions about these handouts by contacting the Technical Assistance Exchange at adrc-tae@lewin.com

¹ Definition developed by Technical Assistance Exchange including National Association of State Units on Aging and ADRC grantees

Following-up

Options counseling may involve multiple contacts and may include an aspect of “following along” as families continue to make decisions. For the most part, ADRCs should try to limit intensive options counseling relationships to short-term ones usually no more than 90 days. However, following-up to see what decisions have been made, if further assistance is required and if the options counseling was helpful is critical.

Strategies for Staff Providing Options Counseling

Options counselors work hard to build rapport and trust with families and following-up is another way of strengthening an individuals’ relationship with the ADRC. Complete, accurate and appropriately detailed documentation is essential in the options counseling follow-up process. The note related to an options counseling session should include a brief description of the needs, options discussed, and an action plan. Focusing on these three components ensures the note remains succinct and easy for supervisors or other staff to assist an individual should they call back and the person who was helping them initially is not available. It also serves as a way for staff to assess if they really provided decision support or not. If an options counselor can’t write about the needs, options discussed, and the plan of action, then options counseling probably did not happen. The action plan might include contacts the ADRC worker will make and steps the consumer and family will do.

It is often helpful to leave written documentation with the individual and family as a reference. When the options counselor follows-up with the family he or she can reference this documentation and ask questions about what decisions individuals made or the outcomes of agreed upon actions steps. Tracking this information will help evaluate the effectiveness of options counseling and will contribute to continuous quality improvement as individual options counselors can improve skills based on feedback from individuals and families.

Strategies for Program Planners and Managers

Fully functioning ADRC criteria outline that the ADRC should have standard follow-up procedures for both Information and Referral/ Assistance (I &R/ A) and options counseling.² Some sample follow-up policies are referenced below. However, policies and procedures should not interfere with the options counselor’s ability to use common sense in following-up with a family.

Program planners and managers should also provide substantial training to staff on appropriate on documentation for options counseling. The Wisconsin documentation guide below may be a useful tool. Chart reviews can also be helpful in providing constructive feedback to staff about the quality of options counseling notes. Wisconsin reports that some of the most satisfied consumers were ones who received follow-up.

² Administration on Aging and the Technical Assistance Exchange (revised June 2010). “Fully Functioning Criteria for Single Entry Point Systems and ADRCs” available at http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=29400

Providing training on the importance of evaluation and continuous quality improvement will be key in achieving buy-in from staff. Grounding these conversations in sustainability and the overall mission of the ADRC may be helpful. Developing a definition of options counseling for reporting purposes and offering training about appropriate reporting will be essential. Some state examples are below. Additionally, planners and managers must set expectations about what information should be tracked in terms of outcomes of individuals who receive options counseling.

Additional Resources for Following-up

- *ADRC Options Counseling Documentation Guide*. This document developed by Brown County Wisconsin ADRC provides a guide for conducting and documenting options counseling sessions organized by three main areas - assessment of need, options discussed, and action plan. The document also maps to the core competencies. http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=29304
- *Wisconsin ADRC Activity Reporting*. This document provides reporting definitions for information and assistance, options counseling, enrollment counseling, and short-term service coordination. Available at <http://dhs.wi.gov/lc/lc/pdfs/ADRCActivityReportingDefinitions.pdf>
- *Measuring Options Counseling*. This is the final version of the "Measuring Options Counseling" Goals and Objectives grid that was originally developed by a group of ADRC grantees on a series of Evaluation Peer Workgroup Calls. The outcomes, indicators and strategies for evaluation would apply to ADRC and Nursing Home Diversion options counseling activities. http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=29278