

BENEFITS COUNSELING: JOINT FIDELITY/OUTCOMES CONFERENCE CALL

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Discussion Leaders – Alexis Henry, Anne Reither

Participants: Karen Heath (AK), Dara Johnson (AZ), Pat Curtis and Sandra Mott (IL), Alexis Henry (MA), Joe Longcor (MI), Melissa Money-Beecher and Sharon Johnson (NE), Lisa Johnson (ND), Bob Reis (PA), Brooke Lusk (SD), Steve Kozak (WA), Barry Delin (WI).

MIG-RATS/MPR Staff: Anne Reither, Amy Porter, Gilbert Gimm

This is a follow-up MIG-RATS workgroup meeting on benefits counseling (BC) for those who did not attend the NCHSD conference in September. The purpose of the call was to advance the discussion from the NCHSD meeting and focus on next steps.

NCHSD Conference Workgroup Summary

- Conference attendees were organized into 4 separate discussion groups, which covered service delivery inputs, service delivery activities, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes in more depth.

Fidelity (Service Delivery) Discussion

- Input domains for service delivery include:
 - Caseload (size of caseload, populations served, staffing)
 - Context (location of service delivery, funding, organizational type)
 - Training (initial curriculum, access to ongoing support)
- Activity domains for service delivery include:
 - Communication (ongoing contact, materials provided, etc.)
 - Services (intake information, duration/frequency of services, depth/breadth of information, level of assessment, etc.)
 - Outreach (advertisement, recruitment methods, etc.)
- It was noted that in the service delivery group, there was considerable discussion on how to describe the range of services provided. It was also challenging because there is no “best practice” standard for a true fidelity measure.
 - We would like to distinguish specialists who are trained to provide BC services from general information on benefits that is similar to community outreach and education. The definition can be flexible and individualized for each state, unless we are making cross-state comparisons that require a more uniform definition of who provides BC.

- The group decided to target the survey to practitioners who provide benefits counseling support, but have an actual caseload.

- Since there is no 'best practice' standard for benefits counseling, the primary purpose of doing a survey of benefits counselors is to better understand how states are operationalizing BC services. This will give states an opportunity to identify which aspects of service delivery are consistent across time and multiple states.

Outcomes Discussion Group

- At the NCHSD meeting, the group discussed the logic model, which did not fully capture the complexity of relationships between intermediate/long-term outcomes at a level appropriate for a research model.
 - For example, the use of work incentives may only be applicable if you are employed first.
 - Also, there may be other relevant outcomes including quality of life.
 - Do you measure long-term outcomes (e.g., earnings) at the individual level or an aggregated (statewide, regional) population level?
- It was mentioned that it did not make sense to have a "one size fits all" approach to the logic model framework that would be applied uniformly to all states.
 - It would be preferable to have a survey or plan as a framework that states could apply in different ways, instead of a single logic model.
- **Next steps include expanding the list of outcomes and deciding whether outcomes will be measured at the individual or aggregate population level. This step will have an impact on which data sources are available.**

Next Steps

- The next workgroup meetings will be separate teleconferences on November 27th (fidelity) and December 4th (outcomes), both from 2:30pm-4pm ET, to continue the development of the survey and finalize outcomes.
- MIGRATS will consolidate information from the NCHSD conference and follow-up with information for discussion on the next call.