

November 2006 CMS MIG Conference (Chicago, IL)
Workgroup #2: Benefits Planning Research

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The Benefits Planning Research session at the CMS data meeting was met with a lot of interest and enthusiasm. The group is interested in continuing this discussion, as captured in the next steps. The notes from the session are arranged by learning objective.

Session Objectives:

1. Describe the key data elements available for measuring benefits counseling outcomes

The group was particularly interested in understanding the context in which benefits counseling is delivered within states and between states. There is concern that there is no operational definition of benefits counseling, and therefore, no way to measure fidelity of the services, or consistent outcomes of benefits counseling.

The group also wants to create a minimum data set, regardless of funding source, that will allow researchers and program evaluators to answer the question of benefits counseling impact on employment and earnings.

Based on the long-term outcome measures, the group shared information on potential data sources:

- Employment: UI Data
- Earnings: UI Data
- Decrease in cash benefits: Integrated Data Set, or locally through BENDEX state matches (SSDI) or SDX state matches (SSI)

2. Identify short term outcome measures

The group discussed difficulty in getting at the qualitative nature of benefits counseling. They were also interested in exploring outcomes related to the funding source for the service.

The group also identified intensive interviewing might work to get the detailed information about what people did with the information (the steps before the outcome).

3. Identify key long term outcome measures

The group identified three major outcome measures: 1) Employment, 2) Earnings, and 3) Decrease in cash benefits

4. Identify program evaluation strategies for disability-specific outreach and service provision, including services to individuals with psychiatric or developmental disabilities

The group started the program evaluation discussion by underscoring the differences between benefits counselors, and between programs. To better understand the context in which the service is provided, the group wants to develop a template to assist states in identifying the following issues:

Template

- What is the context of service provision?
- What are the key outcomes? (focus on outcome variables where you can get the same data on both your treatment group and your control group . . . this is why VT isn't using the BPAO data. If there are multiple sources of BC delivery,
- What data would answer this question?
- Who holds this data?
- What are some of the limitations in the data?
- What are some existing data sharing models?
- What data is missing that we might want to work with other agencies to add?
- What data can be linked? (common client identifiers)
- What is the process for linking this data?
- Qualitative side (success stories, non-success stories)

Next Steps:

The group was interested in continuing the dialogue, and has some specific next steps for pursuing effective research on the impact of benefits counseling on employment and earnings. These next steps included the following:

- Coordinate development of a topical workgroup
- Develop a template of key variables
- Distribute copies of VT articles and MPR article
- Develop a template of key variables to serve as a process map for each state's research approach
- Start with operational definition for MIGs/ WIPA data set
- Design Standards/Fidelity
- Send out WIPA data collection requirements to use as a basis for a minimum data set
- Distribute the list of WIPA providers by state