

Options Counseling **Fact Sheet**

WHAT IS OPTIONS COUNSELING?

Options counseling helps individuals and families to make service and support choices for their Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) that fits well with their needs, values and preferences.

It is a service offered by the Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC) operated by state and/or local governments. (1)

WHY SHOULD I USE OPTIONS COUNSELING?

Whether you are an Elder or a caregiver, planning for LTSS is crucial. Options counseling can help you define your wishes and needs, and long-term goals for care, services, and support. Options counseling can also help caregivers to understand the needs of the Elder they care for, as well as their own needs.

Most importantly for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Elders and caregivers, options counseling can help ensure that your values and customs are respected. Planning for the future protects traditions and respects the Elder's wishes, while providing guidance for caregivers.

AI/AN CAREGIVING STATISTICS

Research shows that between up to 21% of the AI/AN population provides care for an Elder, which is higher than the average for the general population of the United States. (2)

An estimated 90% of care for Elders in AI/AN communities is provided by family members. This is likely because of our traditional care practices, where our Elders remain in the home and family members provide care. (3)

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

Options counseling starts with an interview. The counselor must listen to assess the Elder's needs and the strengths and weaknesses of the situation for the Elder and their caregiver. The counselor then helps the family with decision making by narrowing the scope of options to the Elder's specific needs and preferences. (4)

While options counseling programs may vary by state, considerations can include everyday life, eligibility for benefits, health, finances and legal affairs. Options counseling helps an Elder weigh his or her choices to make informed decisions. (5)

The process can help Elders and their families explore choices together and create a plan with outlined steps. This makes complex situations easier to navigate. Planning for financial, legal, and medical challenges improves the quality of life for Elders and caregivers. (4)

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

If you are interested in options counseling, there are a number of resources available to assist you.

1) Find an ADRC

The US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living provides an interactive map to help locate an ADRC near you, as well as a complete directory of ADRCs in the U.S. and U.S. territories: http://www.adrc-tae.acl.gov/tiki-index.php?page_ref_id=739

2) Seek out planning tools

There are a number of tools out there to help you with options planning. For example, the Aging and Long Term Services Department in the State of New Mexico has developed a person-centered planning tool that can help you assess a wide range of topics in considering your options. Other states may have similar tools. Contact your state aging services department or search on their website. Access this tool at: http://www.adrc-tae.acl.gov/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=31034

3) Connect to other resources

The ADRCs that facilitate options counseling can help connect individuals with other programs, services, and benefits. Contact NICOA at (505) 292-2001 to help you find these services in your state or Tribal communities. NICOA - an advocate for improved comprehensive health, social services and economic wellbeing - provides important information on issues affecting AI/AN Elders and their caregivers.

Options Counseling Services may also be offered through your state Indian Area Agency on Aging. According to the AARP, only half of Elders who are eligible for benefits receive them. Benefits may help Elders pay for visits to the doctor, food, utility bills, and more. (6)

SOURCES

- 1). US Dept. of Health and Human Services, www.adrc-tae.acl.gov/tiki-index.php?page=OptionsCounselingTraining
- 2). Centers for Disease Control., www.cdc.gov/aging/caregiving/activities.htm
- 3). National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, www.chronicdisease.org/resource/resmgr/healthy_aging_critical_issues_brief/ha_cib_aiancaregiving_conver.doc
- 4). Aging and Disability Resource Center, www.adrc-tae.acl.gov/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=31119
- 5). State of New Mexico Aging and Long Term Services Dept., www.adrc-tae.acl.gov/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=31034
- 6). AARP, www.adrc-tae.acl.gov/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=26466