

# **OPTIONS COUNSELING: National Perspective**

## ***Adapted from Part A: The Enhanced ADRC Options Counseling Program***

**Funding Opportunity and Grant Application Instructions,  
Administration for Community Living  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
Veterans Health Administration  
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Finding the right services can be a daunting task for individuals and their family members. The current long-term services and support (LTSS) system involves numerous funding streams, and is administered by multiple federal, state and local agencies using complex, fragmented, and often duplicative intake, assessment and eligibility processes. There are more and more options for services and supports, in home, residential, and institutional settings. Individuals trying to access the multitude of new LTSS frequently find themselves confronted with a maze of agencies, organizations and bureaucratic requirements at a time when they may be vulnerable or in crisis. These issues frequently lead to use of the most expensive forms of care, including institutional care such as nursing homes or extended hospitalization, and can cause a person to quickly exhaust their own resources.

The Administration on Aging (now the Administration for Community Living—ACL) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) have provided grants to states over the past decade to develop person-centered systems to make it easier for individuals to learn about and access their LTSS options. These “one stop shop” programs are known as “Aging and Disability Resource Centers” as well as “No Wrong Door – Single Points of Entry” Programs, and they are designed to serve as visible and trusted sources where people can access objective information on their LTSS options and other benefits including Medicare. These programs also provide one-on-one counseling and advice to ensure that individuals, including private pay individuals, fully understand what options are available to meet their particular needs and preferences.

In 2010, ACL awarded funding to 19 states (including Virginia) to partner in the development of a set of national standards for the ADRC Options Counseling Program. Options Counseling is an interactive process whereby individuals, family members and/or significant others are supported by a trained counselor in their deliberations to determine appropriate LTSS choices in the context of a person’s strengths, preferences, and values. ADRC Options Counseling is available to all persons making long-term support decisions regardless of income or financial assets, including individuals who can pay for supports.

Since the 2010 Options Counseling Grants were awarded, ACL has collaborated with 19 grantee states, 65 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), 25 Centers for Independent Living (CILs), a variety of national organizations representing aging and disability populations, and federal partners, to develop national Options Counseling standards. The effort has focused on standardizing the ADRC Options Counseling process so it can be clearly defined, easily monitored, and readily utilized by the states, as well as by private health plans, managed care organizations, and other funders to assist their clients in accessing LTSS. It also incorporates sufficient flexibility to support local diversity and coordination with various federal programs such as the Balancing Incentive Program, Veterans Directed Home and Community Based Services (VD-HCBS), Money Follows the Person (MFP) Demonstration, and other transition support programs.

The national Options Counseling standards are scheduled for completion in the fall of 2012, and the 19 states receiving 2010 grants have already demonstrated tremendous momentum in adopting standard options counseling practices. An additional 21 states are in various stages of planning and development. Many states have developed partnerships with outside organizations for delivering options counseling training. Organizations trained in options counseling to date include senior service networks, CILs, other disability agencies, hospital staff, and community-based nurses and social workers. As a result of this past work, future funded states will work with ACL to finalize the national standards and implement a national training and certification program for ADRC Options Counselors.

ADRCs also are developing a capacity to serve as a national platform to provide transition support to individuals and caregivers. Since ACL and CMS first began funding ADRCs in 2003, ADRCs have been required to work with hospitals and nursing care facilities to assist individuals in “critical pathways,” which are defined as the times or places when people make important decisions about LTSS.

This work included several initiatives to coordinate with the hospital discharge process and to help nursing facility residents' return to the community. The 2009 Program Announcement for ADRCs identified “person-centered hospital discharge planning” as a key operational component of an ADRC system. In 2010, the ADRC Evidence-Based Care Transitions program was launched to support state efforts to significantly strengthen the role of ADRCs in implementing evidence-based care transition models. ADRCs have served as a resource for acute, primary and related health professionals and provide the healthcare system with a “single entry point” to community-based services and supports. This new funding opportunity will build upon this experience and continue to systematically implement evidence-based care transition models in ADRC programs.

In addition, the new funding opportunity requires states to address program sustainability by linking ADRC Options Counseling to Medicaid and VHA rebalancing efforts and CMS supported health systems transformation initiatives. States will develop partnership agreements with the Single State Medicaid Agency for using the ADRC Options Counseling Program to serve as the “No Wrong Door” (NWD) for individuals who are eligible for, or may be eligible for, Medicaid LTSS, making some of the tasks performed by the ADRC Options Counseling Program eligible for Medicaid reimbursement. The ADRCs funded under this new funding opportunity will meet all the CMS requirements for the NWD/SEP structural change called for in the Balancing Incentive Program. Additionally states receiving awards under this funding opportunity will have access to funding from the VHA to help Veterans access VHA-funded home and community-based services.

A high performing ADRC Options Counseling Program is designed specifically to help individuals and their family caregivers access the right services at the right time in the right setting. It will have capacity to serve people of all ages, disabilities and income levels, including individuals interested in planning for or able to pay for their LTSS needs. It will also streamline eligibility determinations for people appropriate for public LTSS programs and increase access to lower cost community-based alternatives that can help avoid institutional care and preserve personal resources. States will use their ADRC Options Counseling Programs as a key tool for rebalancing their LTSS systems and for making their systems more person-centered, more efficient, and more supportive of community living.

Under this funding opportunity, the long-term outcome for successful state applicants will be documented increases in community-living and quality of life for state residents as well as a more effective use of public resources especially as people access lower cost alternatives to institutional care.