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Monthly I&R/A Liaison Teleconference
Thursday, April 5, 2012
11:30 am ET

Meeting Notes

Attendees

Sara Tribe, Policy Associate, NASUAD
56 State, Local and Federal Call Attendees

Welcome

Ms. Tribe welcomed the participants to the call, and updated the participants on the upcoming [AIRS Conference](#), in New Orleans from May 20-23:

- Conference registration is open
- Hotel rooms are filling up fast, so please make your reservations, if you haven't already.
- The Aging and Disability Retreat is on Sunday, May 20 – attendees must sign up on the online registration form by clicking either AAA or SUA (even if they are not from one of these organizations – this is a glitch that we will fix on next year's registration).
 - Retreat will cover: Updates from Washington (AoA, n4a and NASUAD); Eldercare Locator and n4a programmatic updates and annual survey results; NASUAD presenting updates on Managed Care, Preparing for potential changes in 2014, demo of the I&R Support Center's online training;
 - Roundtable discussions on a variety of topics: Medication management, disaster prep, partnerships, engaging Baby Boomer retirees in the aging and disability networks

Ms. Tribe thanked everyone who submitted workshop proposals, and stated that the final workshop schedule would be coming out in the next couple of weeks.

Ms. Tribe then introduced Lura Barber, Senior Policy Analyst at the National Council on Aging (NCOA) and the National Center for Benefit Outreach and Enrollment, who will be presenting on improving access to SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

SNAP Presentation

Ms. Barber welcomed everyone to the call, and briefly described her organization, NCOA, a nonprofit service and advocacy organization, whose mission is to improve the lives of millions of older adults, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

She continued with the agenda, which was designed to discuss all angles of the SNAP program, whether from a nutrition standpoint, looking at how there are better medical results for older adults if they have proper nutrition, or from an economic benefits standpoint.

Ms. Barber presented the following information:

Some statistics to think about:

- About 5 million seniors will experience hunger this year, and food banks are seeing more seniors become repeat clients.
- Only 1 in 3 eligible older adults participates in SNAP, the lowest rate among all demographic groups – 65% are missing out
- We will need to find innovative ways to reach hungry seniors now and over the coming years, as 10,000 Baby Boomers age into Medicare each day.
- To increase the participation rate and help a greater proportion of vulnerable and low-income seniors to access SNAP will require the benefits expertise of the Aging Network, together with good policy changes, and the implementation of best practices.

Aging Network Assets:

- The Aging Network is a trusted source of information and assistance among seniors, and has long experience in reaching out to seniors and helping the enroll in benefits
- Though SNAP is a relatively new benefit to the Aging Network, there is an opportunity to significantly increase SNAP enrollment rates, help seniors maximize their benefits, and tap into new sources of funding for outreach and enrollment activities
- Your clients who are eligible for benefits like LIHEAP, SSI, LIS, and MSP are likely eligible for SNAP
- Together, the core benefits represent a huge financial and quality of life help to vulnerable older adults and younger adults with disabilities.

Ms. Barber then provided details about the SNAP Program, including:

- SNAP program structure
- How SNAP is used
- Eligibility and Resource Testing
- Application Process

She outlined the reasons why the rate of older adult participation remains low:

- Stigma of “welfare” programs- old food stamp program, taking food stamps is taking welfare- they love going to the senior center, but not to the public welfare office. We need to call it SNAP or food assistance, not food stamps.
- Seniors are less likely to be aware of their eligibility, or of how to apply- this process might be mysterious to them. **They might believe they are only eligible for minimum benefit of \$16, while the average benefit is \$119.**

- Complicated application process
- Transportation: with limited mobility and lack of transportation to get to the grocery is a very persistent issue.

She discussed what the Aging Network service providers and states can do to improve access, including:

- Effective messaging to engage older adults
- Streamlining the application process by screening clients for all benefits, including SNAP
- Integrate SNAP into your training and the 5 steps of benefits access: Outreach, Screening, Application/Troubleshooting, Appropriate Use and Recertification
 - Realization that seniors are missing out on medical deductions- about **14%** of seniors take the medical deduction, but **55%** of SNAP-eligible seniors would qualify

Q & A

Ms. Barber asked about what terminology people use out there in the field, and about success stories with the program.

A: **Alabama** discussed his state's ASAP program, which is an MOU with the AL Department of Human Resources. "Through that program alone, we've had 26,000 seniors enrolled in the SNAP program so far. When they come in for an intake meeting, we ask everyone about food assistance."

Q: Are people seeing a shift in stigma from Greatest Generation (age 75+) to newer boomers who are aging?

A: The greatest number of SNAP users are the 60-64 year old group. Based on a recent hunger study done by MOWAA, this group is also the one showing the greatest food need.

The state of **Florida** discussed the pilot in 35 counties throughout the state, where anyone over 60 can apply over the phone, and never have to enter an office to enroll. They have processed 5,000 applications so far, and over 800 of those in the nearest 2 counties. We are hoping that it will be extended, as it has been a blessing for many seniors. At the federal level, this might be a success story, and can be extended to other areas of the state.

Ms. Barber applauded the great examples from FL and AL on how to enroll people into the SNAP program.

Q: Has there been success linking farmers' markets and older adults using SNAP?

The **Rhode Island ADRC** discussed a senior center in East Providence that has gone out of their way to have a farmers' market there twice per week in the spring and summer, which got three other senior centers to do this, and have ensured that SNAP EBT cards are welcome for purchasing produce. They have a promotion in May that invites seniors to the market, and for every \$1 spent, participants get an additional \$1 worth of food. Though many people only get \$16/month for their SNAP benefit, this program allows them \$32 in fresh produce/month.

A caller from **Kansas City** reported a similar program in which the farmers' markets double the value spent on produce. Farmers' markets are strategically placed in the city where people with the lowest income can access it.

Post call follow-up questions for Ms. Barber :

From Susan Shepherd of Washington:

Q: Can a state have an asset limit less than \$3,250?

A: This is a good question, Susan. The \$3,250 resource limit for households with older adults or people with disabilities is set by the USDA. There is a slightly lower resource limit for other households. States cannot set resource limits below the federal levels; they can only make the resource limits higher, or eliminate them (and most states have taken advantage of that flexibility). The limit just went up to \$3,250 from \$3,000 in 2012, but I've noticed that some websites and other materials haven't been updated, which can create confusion.

I hope this answers your question! Let me know if I can be of further assistance.

From Russ Black of Alabama:

Q: How many state units on aging/disability have MOUs with their state partners that manage SNAP programs to reduce the burden on the elderly on enrollment protocols, i.e.:

- Current application about 22 pages
- Have to get transportation to the SNAP office
- Appear in-person for any verification issues
- Annual re-certification

A: We don't have a quick answer on this, but will post the question to the I&R Liaison group and see if other participants have any insight on this question.

Closing

Ms. Tribe thanked Lura Barber for her presentation.

She reminded everyone that the next call would be the first Thursday of May, 5/3.

The call ended at 12:40pm ET.