

ROLE OF WISCONSIN'S AGING NETWORK IN THE PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF AN ADRC

The purpose of this document is to clarify the Department's expectations for the involvement of county and tribal aging units and other members of the Aging Network in the planning, development and implementation of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC).

A. Issue

Creating an ADRC involves creating a new public entity by realigning certain functions of county agencies now serving elders, adults with disabilities, and those charged with securing economic support and public health. Since older people will be a majority of the customers of the ADRC, it follows that the aging network needs to be integral to the ADRC. The question is how should this involvement take place?

B. Background

The advent of the Aging and Disability Resource Centers in Wisconsin creates an opportunity for localities to adopt new roles and new public identities to serve a larger population that is aging and living longer with greater levels of disability, as well as younger persons with disabilities seeking fuller lives in their communities.

The ADRC intentionally stands apart from the delivery or financing of direct services in order to provide greater attention and objective information to citizens trying to navigate the complex array of programs and benefits, private as well as publicly financed community services and supports. The ADRC can provide leadership in identifying gaps in community services, locating informal supports and new providers, facilitating a seamless eligibility processes, and generating more rigorous approaches to the prevention of disability and management of chronic illness. The ADRC is not an "intake" unit for public human services. The ADRC is free of conflict of interest, as it does not promote the services of any single provider or managed care entity, nor does the ADRC benefit financially from choices made by consumers.

It is a demographic reality that **a majority of persons using the ADRC will be elderly people** or their family members, which obligates the ADRC to establish its credibility and culture as acceptable to older generations of consumers, in particular avoiding the "welfare" stigma. At the same time, the ADRC must be competent and able to **meet the needs of younger adults with disabilities or illnesses, and their families**, in comfortable non-stigmatizing ways, which focus on opportunities and abilities rather than disabilities.

C. Stakeholder Involvement

Planning for an ADRC must involve all key stakeholders and groups representative of the populations served, and the key service network representatives for the elderly and adults with disabilities.

Organizations applying to be an ADRC are expected to work collaboratively with local public agencies serving older people and people with disabilities and to involve consumers and other stakeholders from the community at large in the planning, development and operation of the ADRC. Planning for an Aging and Disability Resource Center is an opportunity to engage stakeholders and citizens in designing an organization that will best meet customer needs and will provide excellent customer service to the public.

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Agencies must provide assurances in their applications that the plans for ADRC development are fully supported by county aging units, social service departments, community programs, and long-term support units, whether they are in the same or separate county departments. Decisions that are made about ADRC development should be documented and transparent to the public.

D. Aging Network Involvement

The ADRC provides a **new identity** for the aging network as well as for other components of county human services delivery.

Since experience indicates that a majority of the customers of the ADRC will be older persons or their families, the expertise and responsibilities of the aging units should be incorporated into the operation of the ADRC whenever possible, through the **integration** of aging unit and ADRC functions.

State, area and county agencies established and funded under the auspices of the federal Older Americans Act have been shaped by federal and state statutes and thirty years of tradition. Federal and state laws require that area agencies on aging (AAA) and county and tribal aging units assure that Older Americans Act (OAA) programs are governed by a majority of older persons, and that each area agency on aging must provide - through contracts with county and tribal aging units - information and assistance, benefit specialist (legal) services, and advocacy for older adults regardless of income. These functions have consciously been incorporated into the role of the Aging and Disability Resource Center in Wisconsin statutes and more recently in the federal Older Americans Act amendments, which require implementation of Aging and Disability Resource Centers. Wisconsin's aging network will continue to change as recommendations from an extensive two-year planning process, known as the "Aging Network Modernization Project," are implemented. One recommendation to ensure "convenient service areas" is that aging units be "integral to the development and operation of state funded Aging and Disability Resource Centers."

Planning. Older persons and staff representing aging units shall be involved in planning the ADRC to meet the needs of seniors, avoid redundancy, and meet statutory requirements.

Approval. In addition, county commissions/committees on aging should review and approve the ADRC service delivery plan, as it pertains to service delivery to older people.

Quality. Older people and their families and other consumers and stakeholders can play an important role in quality assurance at the ADRC.

Funding. The OAA funds several important program functions that have been incorporated into the ADRC concept, including information and assistance, benefits counseling and outreach. For this reason, area and county aging plan requirements for 2007-2008 direct the aging network to plan for participation in the expansion of ADRCs, including identifying aging funds or personnel that will be committed to the work of the ADRC. See ADRC Information Bulletin #11 for more detail.

Aspiring ADRCs must demonstrate a commitment to participation from **all** partner organizations. Commitment must include the willingness to reevaluate current practices for delivering access to services and to realign those services within the ADRC model.