



Community Involvement Activities Committee

MEETING SUMMARY

The Planning Council believes that the voice of the community is paramount. The purpose of the CIAs is to help bridge the gap between the community and service providers by creating opportunities to involve community members in the planning process. In addition, community members will receive crucial updates on changes in the Ryan White and related health/social services.

Wednesday, February 26, 2020, 5-7PM
Willing Heart Community Center
555 Martin Luther King Blvd. Newark, NJ 07102

1. Welcome and Moment of Silence

Warren Poole, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:10 PM and welcomed all in attendance. A moment of silence was observed for all those living with, those who have passed, and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

2. Mission statement & Ground rules

Poole asked one of the attendees to read the committee's mission statement. Poole reminded all attendees about the Ground Rules previously agreed on. Poole explained that the Planning Council allocates Ryan White Part A funds for 5 counties in the EMA area and is interested in hearing from people affected by HIV/AIDS who do not work for a Ryan White funded agency. All attendees were encouraged to be part of the CIA Committee and the Planning Council.

3. Public Testimony

There was no Public Testimony

4. Approval of Last Meeting's Summary

5. Ryan White Part A Updates

Support Staff stated that the FY'2020 Needs Assessment will be focused on Housing given the demand for this service in the Newark EMA. Therefore, the Council and the Recipient want to hear your input about Housing related barriers and challenges. Aliya Onque from the Recipient's Office will host today's discussion on Housing by asking key questions. The conversation about Housing will continue at the next CIA meeting with a particular focus on the HOPWA program.

6. Old Business

7. New Business

a. *What is the Needs Assessment?*

A brief activity was held with meeting attendees to explain what a needs assessment is all about. Using this activity as a discussion starter, Support Staff explained that the Needs Assessment aims to investigate the needs of People Living with HIV in the community. Therefore, Support Staff encouraged all attendees to participate on surveys and community conversations to provide their

input. Support Staff restated that everyone's input will be captured at this meeting without any identifying information.

b. Community Conversations about Housing in the Newark EMA

Aliya Onque, the Ryan White Program Coordinator, stated that the Newark EMA is embarking on a new initiative to end HIV - by (1) diagnosing more people earlier, (2) getting them into care ASAP, (3) helping them stay in care, and (4) locating those out of care and bringing them back with ongoing support. Onque mentioned that the Ryan White Program is partnering with the new national "Ending the HIV Epidemic" initiative (EHE or EtE)– to reduce new HIV infections by 90% by 2030. Through the federal EHE, 48 geographical areas were targeted for high HIV – in NJ, this is Essex and Hudson counties. Since many HIV+ residents of Essex receive care and services in Union and Morris/Sussex/Warren – all counties will be participating.

One of the priorities is to use Community Health Workers (CHWs) to do field outreach and help return people to care. Another is to address the needs you have repeatedly mentioned to address – need for housing – and to provide more housing assistance (funding) – possibly following a HOPWA- type model. Onque mentioned that the Ryan White Program currently does not cover security deposits but can provide up to 2 months of rent to allow clients to pay the security deposit. Onque also mentioned that HOPWA does not cover security deposits because HOPWA pays for the 1st and 2nd month of rent. Onque mentioned that Ending the Epidemic Initiative might provide an opportunity to increase housing assistance. There is data on housing for RW clients – but today the Recipient's Office wants to hear some of the realities and challenges for housing to help the Recipient develop possible solutions. The input asked from attendees is about the community as a whole..

The Housing Categories for Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program and HUD were cross-referenced with the US DHHS and CHAMP Housing status and shared with all attendees. Onque conducted the following questions to 32 attendees and the following were the responses shared.

1. What kind of housing do you/friends live in? House, apartment? Shelter? Other? Own, rent?

14 attendees rent an apartment in a building

10 attendees live in a house

One attendee owned a house

No one reported living in a shelter and there was no other type of housing mentioned

2. Do you receive a subsidy? What kind? HOPWA, public housing, Section 8, etc.?

13 attendees mentioned receive HOPWA

4 receive Public Housing

2 receive Section 8 and

1 resides in a subsidized building

3. Do you now or ever had to "double up"? (Stay with family, friends for a short term or longer-term basis?)

13 out of 32 attendees mentioned doubled up with family, friends for a short term or longer-term basis at some point in their lives.

One attendee mentioned that she was currently living with a friend.

4. ***How would you describe your housing situation? Stable, temporary, transitional, unstable? Now and over time – say the past 1-2 years?***

24 out of 32 attendees declared that their housing situation is Stable,

3 attendees were living in Temporary housing

There was no mention of transitional or unstable housing situations, but someone stated that some people might not feel comfortable disclosing that information openly.

5. ***Has your housing situation changed recently? Was that good or bad? Describe.***

5 attendees described their housing situations as bad for the following reasons:

- One attendee stated that an eviction letter was received and another said a recent roommate girlfriend's pregnancy (who now needed the apartment empty). Those attendees were referred to a housing agency to get services.
- One attendee mentioned that she's living in an unsanitary house for over one year.
- Another attendee mentioned there were rodents in his area.
- Another attendee reported that there is bad housing maintenance in his apartment.
- One attendee stated that he recently transitioned from one Housing agency to another, which led to delays with rent payments. Attendees added that some programs require a year to year lease or a month to month or by 6 months, which presents a barrier. The attendee also added that his new landlord wrote a long-term lease, but he doesn't want to sign since he wants to move in the near future. He added that if his SSI benefits increase, the rent goes up as well and that increase goes towards the rent. So he asked: "how much landlords can keep raising the rent?" Onque mentioned that a legal consultation can be providing to talk about housing issues. Client was referred to Legal Services of New Jersey.

On the other hand, 2 attendees mentioned the following:

- One got approved for HOPWA recently
- While, the other had a new residence.

6. ***Are you able to take your medications on schedule in your current housing situation? Why or why not?***

27 out of 32 people responded that they take their medications on schedule given their current housing situation citing the following as reasons:

- "Being a responsible adult"
- "Stability"
- "I take the medication at the same time everyday"
- "I know that I have the virus [HIV]"
- I take the medications "because I want to live"
- "A habit"

Two answers on why someone might not take their medication on schedule in their current housing situation were shared:

- "If someone is in a shelter, the person might not be able to take it [their medications]" since some shelters have confidentiality rules/regulations. A non-Ryan White funded shelter was mentioned.

- Because the person has “not fully disclosed their status and was at someone else’s house.”

7. ***Do you know anyone who has been denied housing? For what reasons?***

9 attendees mentioned they knew someone who had been denied housing. The reasons were the following:

- “Age”
- “Waiting List is too long”
- Bad credit (“Poor Credit”)
- “Prior Eviction”
- Not living in a city where assistance was requested
- “No rental history”
- “Single father” (Gender) – “Family shelters only allows women and kids and not dads”.
- “Incarceration”

8. ***Do you know anyone who has lost their housing? For what reasons?***

15 out of 32 attendees stated they knew someone who has lost their housing. The following reasons were shared:

- “Not paying rent”
- “Drug use”
- “Children that got taken away by DYFS” (Child Protective Services)
- “No smoking inside” (Smoking where not permitted)
- “Not following the rules” (Sub leasing)
- “Bad attitude”
- “Domestic Violence”
- “Filing a complaint” (Whistleblowing)
- “Vandalism”
- “Hoarders” (Unsanitary conditions)
- Not handicap accessible

9. ***How can we use housing to improve health – viral load – so that you/friends are undetectable or virally suppressed?***

Attendees mentioned that being stable means being less stressed. Stable housing was also said to help “be mentally healthy” and to improve health.

The following areas were mentioned as important:

- Therapy, Psychology, and medications
- Ownership of apartment
- “Classes”
- Inspecting apartment
- “Giving incentives to make people want to be virally suppressed.”
- “Be able to structure your meals” (Housing Constructive Meals)
- “Disable housing” (Handicap accessible)

10. ***If we were to add funding for housing – how could it work best to help people remain in care and improve health and viral suppression?*** This question was addressed above

How could we best use the funds? (What kind of rules should we have?) This question was not asked.

11. ***Who should get priority for additional housing funds? (VLS vs non-VLS)***
Attendees provided different perspectives on who should be a priority for additional housing funds. Some thought that priority must be given to those Not Virally Suppressed for the following reasons:

- “To get virally suppressed to stop transmission.”
- “Mentally ill” people should get priority for additional housing funds “to become undetectable.
- People with in-home support
- “Non virally suppressed people that are on halfway houses” should be a priority. It was also mentioned to create a halfway house program for Non-Virally Suppressed that could last from 9 months to a year to graduate to help them reach Viral Load Suppression.

However, one consumer mentioned that “all people are different” and might “not [be] able to reach viral load suppression.”

On the other hand, other consumers thought that virally suppressed clients should get priority for the following reasons:

- They “show stability”
- Must “further support to keep them stable”
- “Can help those who are not Virally suppressed”

12. ***We would want to provide support for housing, such as medical/non-medical case management, substance abuse and/or mental health treatment. Would that be helpful?***

18 attendees said this would be helpful.

13. ***We are allowed to provide up to 24 months (2 years) of housing support? Is that enough time to allow you/friends to get unsubsidized housing? How could we best use additional housing funds?***

Only one attendee stated that 24 months would be enough time to allow someone to get unsubsidized housing.

- “It depends on the mindset of the person.”
- “Not good for everyone” – It varies on the circumstances of the individual.
- Depends on the support provided over the 24 months.

On the other hand, 8 attendees claimed that 24 years would not be enough time to allow someone to get unsubsidized housing for the following reasons:

- “Don’t know the future” Not enough time to get unsubsidized housing
- “Don’t know the barriers that prevent people from having housing.”

- “A person could be finishing school to get a job.” Student Loan debt
- Not enough time to fix credit
- The rent is too high for income (most repeated answer)
- “Medical” reasons

It was mentioned that 2 years may be enough time to get subsidized housing but not enough time to afford unsubsidized.

The consensus was that additional housing funds could be used for more subsidies because the market rent is too high, and many clients have fixed incomes that are not enough to afford rent.

Onque mentioned that the Recipient is trying to restructure how funds are used for the Ending the Epidemic Initiative specially housing funds. This input will be considered for this matter and all answers area anonymous.

c. Q&A – REGARDING Housing services in the Newark EMA.

Christina Baluja from the New Jersey Housing Collaboratives provided the following information:

- The HOPWA Program in the Newark EMA is reconstructing.
- The New Jersey Housing Collaboratives provides with Emergency Temporary Services to link to Case Managers for Housing and for Emergency placement. The New Jersey Housing Collaboratives also help people regardless of their migratory status. The number to call is 1-800-624-2377.
- There are Housing meetings from HUD Committees (Non-Ryan White) with different agencies that are trying to get funding in the community for beds and shelters, temporary housing, vouchers, and other ways to get housing funds. Community representation at these meetings is important for the community to provide their input including homeless people or those who were homeless in the past. This committee votes and fights HUD announcements of funding proposals or cuts.
- There is an Assessment Center in the Essex County to coordinate entry, but the program is not running. Once the program starts to run, they will have one location to call for eligibility. There will be a list of people with housing needs including homeless which will go first. Also, agencies that are part of this committee, will have to go through the list. Newark EMA counties have different resources. Sussex, Warren have the least and Union has 211.
- There are also agencies for veterans – Soldier On. This agency in involved with the V.A. and has vouchers available. It also has case management and helps with continuing of care.

8. Announcements

The following announcements were made:

- The importance of knowing the different housing categories was emphasized and about the Ryan White Program and HOPWA Program and their regulations
- The HOPWA Program is changing and will not provide funds for those who are not virally suppressed. There will be a Meeting on March 19th to voice input regarding the recent changes in HOPWA.

- The USDA Guidance on Date Labelling to Reduce Food Waste was handed to all attendees. The importance of knowing the difference between the “Best if Used By”, “Use-By”, and “Sell By” was stated.

9. Next meeting

The next CIA/CC meeting will be held on March 25, 2020 at 5 pm at the Willing Heart Community Center located at 555 Martin Luther King Blvd. Newark NJ 07102.

10. Adjournment

This meeting was adjourned at 7:00 pm.