Strategies to Address Long-Term Services and Supports

Brief Four: Local Needs Assessments

Informing Policy. Advancing Health.

TCHF Goal

Support the development of a statewide long-term services and supports (LTSS) needs assessment.

Potential Tactics

- Create standard evaluation metrics and process. Enable local communities to apply for needs assessment.
- Fund local assessments that generate results that are actionable.
- Fund local assessments that take into account imminent demographic shifts in the aging population.

Defining the Problem

A statewide community needs assessment should be conducted on a regular basis in order to inform strategic planning and policy making and effectively allocate resources. Individual community needs assessments that don't use the same metrics pose challenges in comparing strengths and needs across the state and identifying areas with the most acute needs. Assessing communities on a regular basis helps support the evaluation of interventions.

The last comprehensive, systematic, statewide LTSS community needs assessment was conducted in 2004 and did not include Medicaid services or services for individuals with disabilities. Colorado does not have rigorous up-to-date, uniform assessments at a community level.

In Colorado

The Older Americans Act requires each Area Agency on Aging (AAA) region and the State Unit on Aging (SUA) to create four-year plans. Ideally, these plans would be informed by regular strengths and needs assessments in each region. There has not been enough funding, however, to conduct assessments on a more regular basis. In recent years, the SUA has conducted a statewide review of LTSS and broken down the analysis by the AAA regions, with one report published in 2004 and another in 2010. The next assessment is expected in 2016.

The 2004 Strengths and Needs Assessment of Older Adults in Colorado[1] report was more rigorous than the more recent 2010 survey, although some AAAs decided to fund in-depth analysis specifically in their geographic area in 2010. The 2004 assessment included demographics, strengths and needs identified by older Coloradans, and cost estimates for meeting needs. The drawback to the 2004 report is that it includes services for older adults but not individuals with disabilities. Importantly, it does not include any analysis of the availability and demand for Medicaid long term services and supports. However, the data sources, survey and methodology might provide a working example of a

successful statewide assessment. Further, the SUA and AAA assessments have been used for planning purposes by the legislature, community leaders and funders across the state.

Critical Success Factors

To create a complete picture of LTSS in Colorado, there are a number of critical success factors to consider while creating needs assessments.

- Stand-alone local needs assessments can be useful. However, only high-functioning communities may seek assessments. A statewide analysis at the local level will allow TCHF and communities to understand which local areas have most acute needs.
- Standard metrics should be used across all local communities for comparative analysis.
- Assessments should focus on metrics that are actionable. (Example: Types of services available and estimated demand per 1,000 LTSS users.)
- Assessments should focus on metrics that measure both supply and demand so that a gap analysis can be performed.
- Due to future demographic shifts, assessments should be forward-looking and take into account anticipated changes in communities' need for services.
- Assessments should be conducted regularly to track progress or a lack thereof.
- Strategic dissemination of local needs assessments is essential to be impactful in the policymaking process.

Examples of Successful Innovations

LTSS strengths and needs assessments are widely done across the country, though they often differ in the impetus for the assessment, what is included and how it is conducted.

Minnesota

Since 2001, Minnesota has conducted the County Long-Term Care Gaps Analysis Survey every two years. The Minnesota legislature approved reform measures in 2001 to help rebalance the state's long-term care system toward more home and community based services. As part of that effort, the legislature called for biennial surveys of local capacity to meet long-term care needs at the county level. These surveys focus primarily on housing and services and do not include information on demographics or cost analysis. Further, the surveys focus on the 65 and older population (with one exception, in 2007, when they included questions about persons with disabilities of all ages).[2]

While the Minnesota example does not include demographics or consider the needs of individuals with disabilities, the state has been able to compare changes in service capacity across the years. The ability to track progress can help with evaluating interventions and creating targeted plans to address needs.

Connecticut

The Connecticut General Assembly authorized and funded a comprehensive statewide Long-Term Care Needs Assessment in 2006, the first in 20 years. The University of Connecticut Health Center on Aging was selected to conduct the assessment. The assessment includes several components that were rolled out over 2007 and 2008, including survey results from residents and providers, a rebalancing report to examine home and community based services, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman report, a financial planning assessment, specific reports on mental health and disability programs, and an analysis by region. [3]

The regional analysis points out that no two regions are the same in Connecticut. The analysis includes demographics, socio-economic status, health status, users of LTSS services, the unmet need and more. This information is useful in planning. However, it does not include a financial analysis of how much addressing unmet needs across the state would cost.

Tomkins County, New York

Tomkins County undertook a long-term care needs assessment in 2010 to describe who needs long term care, how services are provided, where there are gaps in service, related issues, promising trends, and who pays for services. This is an example of a local needs assessment in a high functioning community that wanted to improve access to needed care in the community. It was a program of the Tompkins County Long-Term Care Council as a part of NY Connects, New York's statewide long-term care information and assistance centers, and it established a process to identify emerging community needs.

The assessment included a community survey of unmet needs, relevant data from the state department of health and other sources and reports by several experts on local services. The data reported includes demographics and anticipated demographic changes, current capacity and gaps in the long-term care community of services. Further, this assessment includes all users of LTSS including individuals with disabilities. The report has recommendations and encourages community agencies, current and potential providers of services, legislators, and foundations to use to help make informed funding and development decisions.[4]

Policy Considerations for Colorado

Each community needs assessment should be uniform in order to compare gaps and strengths across the state. The assessments should include a variety of information, from numbers of nursing home beds, survey of LTSS users and infrastructure supports that allow LTSS users to remain in the community. Components included in the 2004 Strengths and Needs Assessment should be considered as a way to measure successes and failures over time.

Endnotes

[1] "Strengths and Needs Assessment of Older Adults in the State of Colorado: Repots of Results." 2004. Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Aging and Adult Services. Available at: http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/CDHS-VetDis/CBON/1251595435948.

[2] "2009 Long Term Care Gaps Analysis." Minnesota Department of Human Services. Available at: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=dhs16_141764.

[3] "Connecticut Long-term Care Needs Assessment Reports." UConn Center on Aging. Available at: http://www.uconn-aging.uchc.edu/res_edu/assessment.html.

[4] "Improving Outcomes for People in Tompkins County By Strengthening the Long Term Care System." January 2010. Prepared by the Health Planning Council, a program of the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County, Ithaca, NY. Available at: http://www.hsctc.org/uploads/documents/2010%20LTC%20Needs%20Assessment.pdf