

## Uniform Discharge Planning Strategy

**Goal:** Promotion of exemplary discharge planning practices for homeless individuals and individuals at risk of becoming for the purpose of connecting individuals to permanent supported housing and other community-based resources.

**Objective:** Decrease number of persons being released from correctional facilities, mental health institutions, medical facilities, foster care, and residential treatment facilities to shelters and the streets.

The Uniform Discharge Planning Strategy has three basic components: The first component is to develop a uniform discharge planning policy through the Homeless Policy Academy and to request implementation through Executive Order of the Governor. The second component involves assessment and analysis of the extent of the problem. The third component focuses on the development of a training curriculum for execution of the policy and to address the needs identified during the assessment phase.

### Year 1 Activities

- 1) Uniform Discharge Planning Policy:** The Homeless Policy Academy will develop and recommend a uniform discharge planning policy across institutions that could be implemented through Executive Order of the Governor for homeless individuals and individuals at risk of becoming homeless. At a minimum, the uniform discharge planning policy may include the following protocols: a) establishment of criteria for the identification of individuals who are homeless and those at risk of being homeless; b) identification of institutions and facilities throughout the state that serve a high number of individuals who are homeless and at risk of being homeless; c) obtaining agreements with identified institutions and facilities to participate in this initiative; d) collaboration with selected facilities and key stakeholders to establish criteria for exemplary discharge planning practices for individuals who are homeless and those who are at risk of being homeless; e) pre-release assistance with benefit acquisition; f) performance standards; and g) recommended methods for the evaluation of the effects of this initiative on individuals who are homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless.
  
- 2) Initial Surveys, Assessment and Analysis:** Catholic Charities will take a lead on conducting two discharge planning surveys to determine the extent of the problem and the barriers and issues being confronted by institutions and facilities serving homeless persons and those at risk of homelessness. The surveys will be a 1) Provider Needs Assessment: A provider survey will be developed and distributed to approximately 200-300 organizations representing emergency shelter, day shelter and outreach providers within the State of Colorado to develop a baseline for determining the number of persons who are being released from institutions, facilities and residential treatment programs to the streets and shelters. 2) Targeted Institutions and Facilities Needs Assessment: An institute/facility survey will be developed and distributed to identify existing discharge planning policies and practices and to better define informational and service gaps. Target agencies include medical facilities,

mental health institutions, correctional facilities and residential treatment facilities. The State of Colorado's Division of Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs will conduct data input and analysis for each survey.

- 3) **Training and Technical Assistance:** Based upon survey data and an executed Discharge Policy, Catholic Charities will develop training curricula and implement an on-going series of regional training workshops and technical assistance to participating institutions and facilities.

Curricula will address both rural and urban concerns. Components will include scaleable in-person training materials plus post-training technical assistance materials to enable on-going cross training and promote advocacy efforts. Curricula will also be available through Web-based services provided by the State of Colorado's Division of Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs. Specific educational topics will include: a) homeless discharge planning protocols; b) benefits facilitation and acquisition; c) data collection and discharge review tools; d) community resources and referral process; e) cross-training and communication; f) service planning and linkage; and g) client advocacy.

#### Year 2 Activities

During the second year of grant implementation eleven regional workshops will be held that include a combination of onsite training and distance learning through video conferencing. The State of Colorado Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs office will coordinate and provide video conferencing/distance learning for rural organizations unable to participate in-person. Following the trainings, Catholic Charities will follow-up with in-person and distant participants to assess qualitative and quantitative benefits of the educational materials and trainings; further track the appropriateness of the uniform Discharge Planning Policy; identify emerging needs, gaps, and advocacy efforts; and to promote on-going cross-training and communication.

- 4) **Follow-up Evaluation:** At the end of the second year, the Colorado Department of Human services will conduct a final survey to measure program effectiveness.

Rationale and Sustainability: There is exponential need across Colorado to educate and coordinate with key administrators and other discharge personnel from hospitals, mental health, correctional, and residential treatment facilities in order to reduce rates of recidivism among the homeless population. Managed care situations and compulsory time restrictions have forced hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions to relegate homeless or near-homeless individuals to shelter facilities--frequently perceived as a sole source option. The establishment of a uniform discharge planning policy along with education and ongoing monitoring by the Homeless Policy Academy would result in an "institutionalization" of the process and positive long-term outcome.