



Ohio House Community and Family Advancement Committee

Testimony on the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program August 12, 2015 Rose Frech, Fellow, Applied Research

Good afternoon, Chairman Derickson, Vice-Chair Ginter, Ranking Member Howse, and members of the Committee. My name is Rose Frech and I work for The Center for Community Solutions, a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy and research organization with offices in Columbus and Cleveland. I am also a licensed social worker in the state of Ohio. The Center for Community Solutions is supportive of the state's efforts to innovate and enhance case management services for low-income young people in Ohio. Between the ages of 16 and 24, young people face multiple obstacles. One in four lives in poverty, and Ohio females ages 15 to 19 give birth at rates that exceed the national level. 15 percent of young Ohioans have not completed high school, and for these people, the unemployment rate is 19 percent. Approximately 10 percent of teenagers have experienced depression. Reducing the impact of these challenges can help to promote a vibrant future for Ohio.

Holistic and individualized case management services are one of several mechanisms, including accessible social services and job opportunities, which are needed to lift individuals out of poverty. However, careful planning, including meaningful collaboration with key community stakeholders, will be key to successful implementation of the comprehensive case management strategy. Today, I would like to offer specific recommendations that will strengthen Ohio's new Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program.

1. While case management has been an established social service practice for decades, there is not a wealth of data available on the outcomes of case management work, particularly as a strategy to decrease poverty and improve self-sufficiency. However, evidence-based models for case management do exist, and in combination with other supports, can produce meaningful results. According to research conducted on commonly used models, key variables associated with positive outcomes include quality supervision for staff, leveraging natural supports such as family, neighbors and churches, making crisis services available, and taking a team approach by collaborating with all involved parties. A focus on consumer choice and the absence of program time limits for those who have intensive needs are also significant factors.
2. Of greatest importance, Ohio Works First (OWF) work requirements, case management services, and work training must be paired with sufficient work opportunities. Although Ohio's economy continues to rebound, many areas of the state continue to lack sufficient employment opportunities for those seeking work. Creative approaches to developing meaningful work placements that can lead to full-time employment should be explored.

Offering short-term training modules for in-demand occupations can offer a concrete mechanism for participants to build skills and meet TANF work requirements. Additionally, all efforts must be coupled with adequate childcare supports, literacy programming, and infrastructure, including transportation.

3. Providing case management services in the client's natural environment whenever possible is also of importance. As evidence, regular home visits were a component of the successful and widely cited TANF funded Building Nebraska's Families Case Management program, which ended in 2006 as a result of changes in federal TANF rules. Meeting clients where they are, both physically and therapeutically, is an established social service practice that plays a significant role in building the rapport needed to develop meaningful working relationships, and is important to reducing barriers to involvement in the program, such as transportation or child care.
4. Caseload size is also cited as a factor associated with successful outcomes. According to the research, positive outcomes are increased when, "caseload size is small enough to allow for higher frequency and quality of contact."¹ Investing sufficient resources in staffing levels can increase the individualized nature of the service and allow for more time to be spent on in-depth assessment and relationship building. In addition, high caseloads are also often an indicator of work stress, which can impact turnover rates. The retention of staff can impact client outcomes, and costs related to turnover, including training and overtime, can be significant for providers.
5. Additional components to success when implementing a case management framework include employing experienced and educated staff. Qualified staff with higher levels of education are more prepared to tackle the demands of the work and are less likely to leave. Their ability to work effectively with clients with intensive needs is greater. The aforementioned Nebraska model was staffed by master's level social workers.
6. Subsequently, providing the resources that allow for competitive wages for staff delivering the services is of importance. Low pay is often cited as a primary factor contributing to turnover in the social services. Additionally, offering higher wages can attract more qualified and educated staff. According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a living wage for a family that includes one adult and one child in Ohio is \$17.28 per hour. Establishing living wage requirements for case managers can decrease the likelihood that staff will have to rely on government assistance to meet their own needs, which only contributes to the burden on taxpayers.
7. Additionally, the state must identify clear objectives and expectations for their initiative. Establishing a clear method for collecting quality data from the onset will be critical to measuring the outcomes of the program, and is imperative to staying accountable to taxpayers. Evidence-based or "promising practice" models should be researched and reviewed, with the involvement and input of local providers, advocates, and consumers. Once

a model is selected, staff should be adequately trained on implementing the model.

8. Furthermore, not everyone who is eligible for services will require intensive case management. Determining a process to assure “goodness of fit” before directing individuals into the program can ensure that the program is efficient and effective, and may decrease costs. This is particularly important to consider if the program expands to older individuals and those involved with other benefit systems, like SNAP. The necessity to rely on a safety-net program for a short period of time during a brief period of financial distress is not necessarily indicative of the need for comprehensive case management.
9. Similarly, avoiding duplication of service is important. As many individuals in WIOA funded programs or receiving TANF benefits have cross-system involvement, they may have case managers through other services and providers, such as mental health or housing organizations. Duplicating this case management function will be confusing for clients and problematic for taxpayers.
10. Incentives can be a powerful component to effective case management. As discussed in U.S. Congressman’s Paul Ryan’s “Expanding Opportunity in America” discussion draft released last year, individuals may be more motivated to follow through with identified strategies if they are linked to appropriate incentives, such as gift cards or saving bonds when certain milestones are achieved. The use of employment retention payments should be considered to incentivize long-term employment and keep clients engaged with case managers.
11. Ohio must work to ensure services are truly individualized. This includes recognizing that the time and path it takes to reach self-sufficiency will look different for everyone, and certain barriers may take longer to overcome than others. While pathways to employment are being established, ensuring that basic needs are met is critical. For example, for clients with mental health and/or substance abuse disorders, the number of hours per week that these clients can engage in treatment services that count toward work participation should be maximized, as untreated mental health and substance abuse issues are significant barriers to work.

In conclusion, social service systems are often complicated. Individuals utilizing these services have complex needs and face multiple barriers to self-sufficiency. Assistance with navigating the system and overcoming these barriers is important. However, case management is only a process; a means to an end, not an end in itself. If thoughtfully implemented, this can be one in a series of necessary efforts to move Ohioans up and out of poverty. We hope you consider our recommendations as the program moves forward. Thank you for your time, and I will welcome any questions the Committee may have.

ⁱ Guarino, Kathleen. “Step by Step: A Comprehensive Approach to Case Management,” The National Center on Family Homelessness. March, 2011.

<http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/237.pdf>