



Addendum: "Adult Protective Services: Opportunities for Savings through Economies of Scale"
September, 2013

Sparking discussion about Adult Protective Services (APS) in Ohio was part of the reason The Center for Community Solutions prepared "Adult Protective Services: Opportunities for Savings through Economies of Scale" in April, 2013. Following its publication, we elicited feedback from a number of stakeholders regarding the report's findings and possible opportunities moving forward.

This addendum is a synopsis of those communications. It provides no additional analysis, and like the original report, it does not contain recommendations.

The addendum is divided into two main sections. The first contains the feedback we received regarding the methodology of the report as well as the identification of additional data that would be needed if a more robust methodology were to be attempted. The second section delineates the comments and discussions regarding future directions for the APS program in Ohio.

Section One: Methodology and Data

Much of the discussion of the report had to do with how the estimates were calculated. Although we used the best, most current data available, several groups correctly pointed out that better data could lead to more accurate estimates. While Community Solutions recognizes that our estimates do not paint a full picture of the funding levels necessary for a robust APS program, we maintain that they are a useful starting point in addressing shortfalls in APS services and funding. The estimates were meant as a springboard for further discussion, and they have been successful in sparking conversation. As in the original report, we emphasize the need for further research and refrain from making definitive recommendations about funding levels. Specific issues that were raised with the methodologies, and key gaps in available data are outlined below.

- The estimates from the original report are based on the baseline assumption of workers performing only the APS investigation as required by law. In reality, many counties provide services that go beyond the state mandate. Examples of such services include, but are not limited to, legal services for victims of elder abuse, social, mental health and physical health services, case management, and referral to other resources available within the community. Because each county has a different process and structure, and because there are differences in what services should be included under the APS umbrella, the estimates only included the constant service, investigation, which spans all 88 counties. An important step for moving forward would be to reach a consensus about what services should be included in one's conceptualization of APS which may include expansion of the existing law.
- It is possible that the APS reported cases data from the state may be inaccurate. The database that is used by the counties to send their data to the state has never been audited, and there is no regular state-provided training on entering the data into the system. The database has several flaws, such as the inability to edit or delete duplicate cases after a certain period of time, a lack of clarity on how to deal with primary vs. secondary allegations, a lack of uniform indicators that determine whether a case is substantiated or unsubstantiated, and several other issues. Because some of the cost estimates were based on these numbers, it is possible that they do not reflect the real number of cases dealt with by counties. Resolving the issues with the database would be a critical first step in resolving the lack of reliable APS data.

- Additional variables, such as time it takes to complete a case, number of cases open at any given time, amount of travel a worker does per call, emergency vs. non-emergency cases, and differences in referral sources would all serve to clarify and add context to the estimates. Unfortunately, data on these variables is not available across counties.
- A better understanding of the current funding structures for each of Ohio's county-level APS programs is necessary. Representatives from several counties noted that Title XX APS spending amounts reported in the ODJFS database for their counties were not accurate. In addition, the counties identified as being able to potentially use levy funding for APS did not take into account the fact that most levies have longer language that specifies exactly how the funds will be spent; this could be changed when levies are renewed or replaced, but at the risk of more competition for scarce resources on the local level. Finally, the funding estimates did not take into account other local dollars, such as funding from county Departments of Job and Family Services general funds. Thus, further research could be conducted in order to gain a complete picture of funding of APS in Ohio.
- There is very little understanding of how counties spend APS funds. Budget breakdowns that explore the specific services and personnel that are funded under the auspices of APS would be beneficial.
- One of the main goals of the original Community Solutions' report was to establish a basic level of knowledge about APS staffing levels across the state. The researcher contacted 88 counties and received staffing level estimates from 48 of them. Nonetheless, some parties felt that there was a lack of nuance in the Community Solutions' staffing estimates. Information on how many full-time and how many part-time employees work for APS; whether there are supervisors who work exclusively for APS; and whether workers are intake workers, initial investigation workers, ongoing investigation workers, or some combination, would have been beneficial. However, this information is not available in a comprehensive and standardized form.
- Prevalence estimates for elder abuse released by the Ohio Family Violence Project in 2010 were not used in the original report. Their figures are based on data from 2006 - 2008. We chose not to include them because the data are six years old, and estimates were made before the economic recession. However, the Ohio Family Violence Project's data remain valuable as a baseline. An update of the estimates would fill a gap in the available data.

- Issues were raised with the methodology to determine average caseloads per APS worker. It was noted that the preferred caseload of 25 that was used for the cost estimates was taken from a state that had a fundamentally different APS structure, and that national guidelines suggest taking a vast range of variables into account when determining a preferred caseload. Much more data would be needed to calculate these variables to determine an accurate preferred caseload. Moreover, a statewide ratio makes the most sense in relation to a standardized program structure. In the current structure, the functions of APS workers can vary by county. At this time, we are unaware of any “better” number to be used in our calculations that is data-driven.

Section Two: Other Feedback

Who should be at the table?

- It was emphasized that county Departments of Job and Family Services, as well as on-the-ground service providers, should be integral to this discussion, and that all discussions regarding the future of Adult Protective Services should be balanced in nature so as to provide a variety of viewpoints.
- The importance of having representatives of the legal system, such as the Prosecutor's Association, involved in the conversation was stressed.
- The County Commissioner's Association was also identified as an important stakeholder when it comes to APS.

What is the relationship between protective services for children and for adults?

- Based on conversations with stakeholders, there seem to be two basic schools of thought when it comes to the relationship between protective services for children and for adults.
 - One point of view is that Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services are very similar and it makes sense for them to be within the same government department.
 - Both deal with violence; both involve services that are largely involuntary; the skill sets needed for workers are very similar; both fall at the intersection of legal issues and social work.
 - Currently, Ohio is one of the few states that does not require APS services for adults with disabilities who are not seniors. If that were to change (as advocates would say would be prudent), the population served by APS would be more than just older adults.
 - Another point of view is that APS and protective services for children have strong differences that need to be acknowledged.
 - Issues of autonomy exist in APS cases in a way that does not occur in cases with children; issues facing older adults are unique and require workers who are attuned to such issues; often child protective workers end up doing APS work without training, knowledge, or a passion for working with older adults.

Does the Ohio Department of Aging factor into the future of APS? If so, how?

- The role that the Ohio Department of Aging, and its affiliated Area Agencies on Aging, play in Ohio was discussed. Some felt that the ODA is meant to be purely a planning agency rather than a department involved in direct service provision. Others pointed out that PASSPORT services are direct services provided by the ODA. Regardless, there needs to be further discussion about how APS would be structured if it were to be moved to the ODA.
- There was concern that Title XX funding would not be able to be used if the ODA were to contract out APS services, due to a perception that Title XX funds can only be used by government entities. *After reviewing federal and state statutes, it has been determined that no laws at the federal or state level prevent Title XX dollars from going to a non-government entity.*
- Concerns were raised that the original report did not adequately explore the possibility of improving and/or expanding APS from within the current ODJFS structure.
- There was sentiment that simply moving APS from ODJFS to ODA would not solve the myriad issues facing the APS system, particularly the dearth of funding.
- It was suggested that the ODA has less public accountability at the local level than the ODJFS does, making a switch ill-advised.

Is regionalization a good idea for the APS system?

- There was concern that regionalization of the APS program would not be prudent due to the important relationship-building work that APS entails. Because APS programs must have strong relationships with outside entities such as law enforcement, social services, the legal system, etc., some felt that juggling those relationships across multiple counties would not be feasible.
- Because APS work involves investigations that occur at the homes of the seniors, the costs of travelling to and from case locations could be very high.
- Along the same lines, some stakeholders felt that the Area Agencies on Aging regions were far too large to be effective working regions for APS work.
- A concern was raised that even in the case of regionalization, more populous urban counties would continue to get the bulk of the resources available, particularly in cases where larger counties also receive levy funding that isn't available in most small counties.
- Levies are only available at the county level, making regionalization difficult in areas where some counties have levies and some do not. The relationship between local and state funding and how these relationships impact regionalization efforts must be examined further.

How should we move forward?

- There was discussion surrounding the fact that the extent of APS services varied by county, as discussed in the report. It was suggested that in order to move forward, there should be a determination of what APS should and should not entail, so that all parties are in agreement about what services they intended to provide.
- One possible strategy for determining how to improve the APS program in Ohio was to identify or discuss what an ideal APS system would look like and to determine what it would take to get to that point—in terms of funding, resources, and getting everyone on board.
- It was suggested that one possible first step towards improving the APS system would be to employ at least one full-time APS employee per county, but some stakeholders disagreed because it was initially proposed as a bare-bones effort to scale up the APS system in Ohio, and it may no longer be the best route forward.
- Improved, standardized, and mandatory training was identified repeatedly as a priority for improving the APS system. It was suggested that standardized training could lead to more standardized practices across counties.
- It was noted that a variety of different research and advocacy groups came up with vastly varied cost estimates, all of which were at least somewhat hindered by a lack of quality data. It was suggested that it would be important to have a consensus figure that was based on comprehensive and reliable data that could be backed by all stakeholders and put forth as an accurate estimate.
- It was suggested that the link between elder abuse and higher Medicare and Medicaid costs be further explored. Studies have shown that elder abuse causes seniors to enroll in Medicaid sooner than they otherwise would due to loss of assets. In addition, studies have also shown that elder abuse leads to increased hospitalization as well as many health complications, which leads to higher health care costs for victims. This was identified as a strong fiscal argument for an improved APS system in Ohio.

- There was discussion regarding Title XX as a funding source. It was noted that because counties get to decide how their Title XX funding is allocated, it is not a very steady funding source, and sequestration has resulted in significant cuts. In addition, Title XX funding can be used for a wide variety of programs and services, making it a very competitive source of funding. The fact that APS is not always seen as a priority makes it even harder to obtain such competitive funding. Thus, the current status where Title XX is one of the largest (if not *the* largest) funding source for APS is not desirable.
- It was noted that continued conversations with legislators regarding Adult Protective Services should be pursued.
- Concerns were raised over the concept of using a shared services/ collaboration/ efficiencies framework for a system such as APS that is already under-funded.
- Strengthening the Attorney General's Elder Abuse Commission and building on their work was identified as a strategy worth pursuing.
- Moving forward statewide conversations on APS initiated by the Office on Health Transformation was seen as an important next step.

Appendix A: Feedback collection

Feedback was collected at three separate meetings of key APS stakeholders. The Center for Community Solutions presented the report's findings as a means to springboard discussions about possible futures for Ohio's APS program. The three meetings were with: the North Coast Job and Family Services Directors; the Ohio Coalition on Adult Protective Services (OCAPS); and the Council On Older Persons (COOP). In addition, other interested parties reached out to the author and contributed feedback via phone or email.



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