

## INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE SERVICES & DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTERS

### Profile of the Issue:

Information and Assistance (I&A) is considered an essential component of a comprehensive and coordinated system of services for older adults. It is designed to be the entry point into the aging network, providing a central source of up-to-date information for older persons, their family members, caregivers and others needing information about services for the elderly. I&A consists of several services including giving information, referring callers to services, providing assistance to those who are unable to access services themselves, advocating for clients, and screening callers to determine whether or not they should be referred on to an appropriate agency for a comprehensive assessment. In-depth assessments by phone are used to determine client needs and, if appropriate, refer to other community services or programs. I & A staff pre-screen for the Snohomish County Respite Program, and conduct eligibility screening for the Snohomish County Case Management Program. In order to provide these services, I&A programs develop and maintain extensive directories and resource files.

In Snohomish County, I&A services are provided through a contract with Senior Services of Snohomish County, a non-profit agency with extensive experience in providing this service. I&A is primarily a telephone-based service in which trained advocates respond to calls during regular business hours. After hours, calls are routed to the Volunteers of America Crisis Line. In addition to phone calls, I&A staff respond to inquiries via e-mail. In 2008, the I&A Program responded to 23,385 calls for information. In addition, staff members completed 7,398 assists, helping persons (age 60 and older) obtain needed services or accomplish necessary tasks because the clients were unable to do so on their own.

Senior I&A also publishes the Senior Source, a resource guide of services and programs for older adults, which is distributed to over 35,000 residents. I & A also maintains a computerized resource directory listing over 900 programs and services in the county. The database is available on the Senior Services' website at [www.sssc.org](http://www.sssc.org), as well as outstations throughout the county. I&A program staff regularly conduct community presentations covering a variety of topics of interest to older adults and their families, and provide training to other service providers throughout the year.

In order to provide services to the non-English speaking elderly and those of diverse cultures, the I&A Program employs staff who are fluent in Korean, Tagalog, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Russian and Spanish. Other interpreters and translation services are used when needed. I&A services are often provided to these elderly (with limited English proficiency) on a face-to-face

basis because language and cultural differences create barriers to simply calling on the telephone. Senior I&A staff have also identified other individuals in need of assistance beyond the telephone-based system. A gap in services exists for vulnerable older adults who are not eligible for case management services, and are not able to access services on their own. This gap exists because these older persons have incomes too high for state funded care and/or they do not have multiple needs that meet the criteria for case management services.

A home visit or face-to-face contact in another setting such as a senior center, may be needed in cases such as when an older adult has difficulty communicating by phone due to a hearing loss or confusion, assistance is needed to complete an application for services, or there is concern about an older person expressed by family, friends, or gatekeepers, requiring an in-person screening to determine the need for assistance.

The elderly population in Snohomish County is expected to significantly increase both in number and diversity over the coming years. It is anticipated that with this growth there will be an accompanying increase in demand for I&A services; in particular, services to non-English speaking elderly.

I & A collaborates with a new, central access service that has been implemented throughout Washington State. North Sound 2-1-1, formerly Community Information Line, is a regional call center connecting Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish and Whatcom residents to trained Information and Referral Specialists. North Sound 2-1-1 staff members answer calls using a comprehensive database of health, welfare, and recreation resources

Senior Information and Assistance Programs have been operating for many years both locally and throughout Washington State. It is the third largest service area funded by Area Agencies on Aging in the state, with significant state and federal dollars expended to deliver the service.

A new initiative through the U.S. Administration on Aging (AOA) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is focused on combining information and assistance services for older adults with the same services for younger, disabled adults. The goal is to develop “one-stop” centers in local communities that help older adults and individuals with disabilities (physical, mental or developmental) make informed decisions about their service and support options, and serve as a single point of entry to the long-term care system. These centers are named Aging and Disability Resource Centers or ADRCs.

In 2006, a pilot project was funded and begun in Pierce County to develop an ADRC in Washington State. There are now a total of 43 states that have instituted pilot ADRCs. AOA and CMS would like to see this model used throughout the nation.

The goal of an ADRC is to offer many choices in counseling and make referrals to a full range of options, that is, in-home services, community-based services, and institutional services and programs. ADRC counselors are not to be experts in every field, but coordinate with specialized counselors at 2-1-1, SHIBA, LTC Ombudsman, Developmental Disabilities Services, Mental Health Services, Employment services, etc. Functions of an ADRC include public education and outreach, resource management, information and assistance (long term support options counseling, public and private benefits counseling, employment options counseling, referral, and crisis intervention), and access services (intake, eligibility determinations, and assessments).

**Problem/Need Statement:**

As the ADRC pilot projects across the nation continue to develop, the usefulness of this type of service model may become more established. It is possible that some future funding opportunities will depend upon the existence of ADRCs across the state. In anticipation of this possibility, Snohomish County needs to identify how it might realign its Senior Information and Assistance Program into an Aging and Disability Resources Center.

Several challenges have already been discovered through the program in Pierce County. Their experience of the issues, along with potential problems identified by staff and the Snohomish County I & A Program, has pinpointed the following challenges:

- Concern that time demands of “options counseling” may overwhelm resources
- Incompatible database systems operated by all the agencies which would have to be integrated
- Constraints of County Internet format and access, and security issues
- Overwhelming reporting requirements
- Lack of physical space to contain new staff, equipment, etc., and the attendant capital costs to resolve the problem
- Vast differences in approach, mission, policies and procedures of core agencies
- Mistrust among community partners in the integration process and outcomes
- Reality of the enormous learning curve this would represent (new and expanded information for community partners to assimilate)
- Outreach to new populations will be a strain on existing resources
- Creating community awareness of the new “system” will require a new plan, funding, and sustained effort

Given the current capacity and resources of the Senior Information and Assistance Program, any new goals and objectives dedicated to integration into an ADRC would only be implemented with additional funding targeted to this process.

**Goal:** Facilitate the expansion of Senior Information and Assistance to also serve a younger, disabled population with increased counseling options and information resources, pending funding.

**Objective:** Create an implementation plan to expand Senior Information and Assistance functions.

**Measurable Activity:** Identify resources and services providers who serve different populations (including 2-1-1). Create a coalition of these service providers. December 2010

**Measurable Activity:** Update current objectives to work on critical issues of adequate resources and communication (e.g., compatible database systems). Collaborate on establishment of critical protocols, policies and procedures. December 2011

**Goal:** Expand the Senior Information and Assistance resource database to meet AIRS (Alliance of Information and Referral Systems) standards and increase access to disability resource information for all ages.

**Objective:** Improve access to services by family and community members through the implementation of the Resource House database collaboration between Senior Information and Assistance and North Sound 211.

**Measurable Activity:** Increase resource records for older adults and disabled individuals needing long term care services. January 2009

**Measurable Activity:** Redesign the Senior Information and Assistance Community Resource website to improve access to services by the community and family members. June 2009



Chrissanne

Age 4

Stanwood