

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services

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Planning grant lays groundwork to prepare for aging population

BISMARCK, N.D. – There is an old saying. To reach a goal, you need to have a plan. The North Dakota Department of Human Services has been working for two years with Minot State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities and a variety of other organizations and citizens to plan how to more effectively serve North Dakota’s aging population and people with disabilities.

Funded through a federal Real Choice Systems Change planning grant to the department, the effort has produced a wealth of information on what seniors and people with disabilities want and need. It also generated state Senate Bill 2070, which the department submitted to secure state matching funds so that North Dakota can develop an Aging and Disability Resource Center.

“We know through research that people want to remain living in their homes or independently in their communities as long as possible,” said Department Executive Director Carol K. Olson. “The department and other public and private providers offer a variety of programs and services. However, when individuals experience a disabling health crisis or their abilities change, it can be difficult to obtain information about available in-home or community-based services.”

Amy Armstrong, the grant project director at Minot State University, agreed. “One of the key things we learned conducting research during this planning grant is that people don’t know where to get information about the full range of long term services.”

According to Olson and Armstrong, the grant helped focus participating organizations on access issues and a single point of entry concept. Olson said the department intends to apply for federal funding to develop a resource center. Forty-three states have already received funding. However, Congress has not acted on the appropriations budget for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that would provide funding to all states.

“Federal funding will enable North Dakota to take the next step in improving access to consumers for all long term care support options,” Olson said.

The Senate Human Services Committee recommended “do pass” on Senate Bill 2070, and the bill is continuing through the legislative process.

Research reports produced during the Real Choice project are posted on the N.D. Department of Human Service’s Web site at <http://www.nd.gov/humanservices/info/pubs/lcccontinuum.html>.

AARP North Dakota provided funding for the grant writer, and the federal government subsequently awarded a Real Choice Systems Change Rebalancing grant to the N.D. Department of Human Services in 2004. The department contracts with Minot State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities to direct the Real Choice Systems Change initiative.

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