



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF AGING
Harrisburg, Pa. 17101

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING

1. File Number: APD-85- 09 ¹¹ -1	2. Disposition: This APD rescinds APD # 82-10
3. Issuance Date: October 1, 1985	4. Effective Date: October 1, 1985
5. Program Area: Information and Referral	
6. Origin: Division of Program Management	7. Contact: Division of Field Operations (717) 783-6007

AGING PROGRAM DIRECTIVE

SUBJECT: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE BY AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

TO: EXECUTIVE STAFF
DIVISION OF FIELD OPERATIONS
AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

DPW, OFFICE OF POLICY, PLANNING,
AND EVALUATION
PDA GRANTEES AND CONTRACTORS
PA COUNCIL ON AGING

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REGULATORY REFERENCE: Older Americans Act, as amended, Section 306(a)(4), (1984).

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Directive is to set policy and establish minimum standards for the provision of Information and Referral Service (I & R). These standards are provided to ensure the satisfactory provision of I & R; to provide a uniform definition and criteria as a means of establishing a more consistent approach to I & R; and to assist AAAs in the upgrading and strengthening of their I & R service delivery systems.

BACKGROUND: Information and Referral (I & R) programs have in recent years been recognized as a vital component of comprehensive health and social service systems. Accessibility problems such as limited means of transportation, restrictive eligibility criteria, bureaucratic complexity, delays in service provision, and lack of knowledge about services have been well researched and documented as barriers preventing those in need from utilizing existing services. As awareness of these problems has grown, attention has been focused more on access services such as I & R, to facilitate entry into service delivery systems, which attempt to overcome the existing barriers.

CONTENT:

I. Definitions of Terms

Information - Information-giving is limited to the simple giving of information about services and facilities.

Referral - For the purpose of this document, referral is defined as either actually making an appointment or a written request seeking an appointment for a person at a facility.

Follow-Up - For the purpose of this document, follow-up is defined as a process which verifies that linkage has been established between the older person and the agency to which he/she was referred.

Service Management - Service Management is a process which is addressed in the current APD on Service Management.

I & R Service Log - A written method or system for compiling I & R contacts received.

Publicity - The use of media and other mechanisms to appraise older people, the general public, and providers of services of the availability of AAA services.

Screening - A process which includes a brief assessment of the inquirer's problem, in order to make appropriate referral possible.

II. Definition of Service

Information and referral is a systematic approach that links people in need to appropriate resources. It consists of the direct provision of information about services and facilities by agencies with a defined responsibility and specifically-identified staff for providing this service to all persons requesting it. Service activities include:

- a brief assessment of the inquirer's problem, to make appropriate referral possible;
- provision of relevant information on, and referral to, community resources providing or making available the needed service;
- follow-up, as appropriate.

Service activities may include provision of information through the mass media or general public information methods including that service provided by Administrative, clerical or other AAA staff when they are confronted with a client request.

As a fully developed service, it is a complex system comprised of several component parts which must include: organization and facilities, resource file, staff, access, screening, information giving, referral, follow-up, publicity, records and reporting.

III. General Requirements

The following components of Information and Referral and the criteria for each are provided for utilization by AAAs to upgrade and strengthen their I & R service systems. The criteria identify ~~minimum standards required in any complete I & R service.~~

A. Organization and Facilities

The criteria stipulated for this component are that the service must be provided by an agency which is--

1. a public or private non-profit voluntary agency or a clearly identifiable, visible unit within a broader agency or organization;
2. incorporated, if it is a voluntary or private non-profit agency;
3. equipped to give particular attention to older people as part of a service to all groups;
4. prepared to assist older people with the entire range of needs or problems they may confront;
5. accessible to walk-in callers with space and privacy to insure comfort and confidentiality during interviewing.

B. Resource File

The resource file must contain the information necessary to enable the provider to efficiently and effectively provide I & R service. A resource file should include, but not be limited to:

1. a complete inventory of opportunities, resources, and services and their providers in all areas relevant to the needs and problems of older people;
2. an information system classified by (a) name and nature of the agency, and (b) types of services available;
3. information which at a minimum includes: name, address and zip code, telephone number(s), contact person(s), business and service hours, area served, and eligibility considerations;
4. an inventory which is updated on a continuing basis with complete verification or revision no less than annually; and
5. an information system coordinated and made available to other agencies providing I & R and/or social services.

C. Staffing

The minimum experience and training qualifications for paid and/or volunteer personnel are:

- (1) For public agencies--as established by current civil service regulations.
- (2) For private non-profit agencies--should apply agency personnel standards that currently exist and/or utilize comparable classifications for I & R positions.

D. Access

In order to be responsive to this requirement, AAAs must assure that--

1. Information and Referral service is available during normal working hours through walk-in centers and by telephone (without long-distance charges to the user);
2. Information and Referral service is provided through a telephone answering service, call forwarding, and/or other appropriate resource for emergencies outside of normal working hours;
3. access to walk-in centers is free of physical barriers to older and handicapped persons; and
4. service is available through individuals conversant in non-English language(s) prevalent in the area or with other special capabilities to relate to the special needs of the population as needed.

E. Screening, Information-giving, Referral and Follow-up

Information and Referral staff shall--

1. receive and assess inquiries in order to determine the nature of information sought and/or the nature of the service needed;
2. provide information requested and/or refer callers, as appropriate, to agencies or organizations for the assistance required;
3. actively assist people in identifying and linking themselves to the service resource;
4. establish and implement standardized procedures for referral to agencies and organizations to which older people cannot link themselves;

5. establish and implement standardized procedures for follow-up to older people referred to service agencies or organizations to determine whether they established linkage; the I & R unit is responsible for follow-up only for those contacts in which a referral was necessary. At a minimum, the follow-up contact should be made within 30 days of the original referral and needs only to determine if the referral was accepted for evaluation by the agency to which the person was referred or if further referrals are necessary; and
6. make an effort to determine the reason for failure when linkage was not effected or a service not provided.

F. Publicity

The criteria for this component stipulate that a provider of Information and Referral must publicize the availability of its I & R service, including a listing in the yellow pages, giving information about how this service may be utilized and a toll-free telephone number of the I & R agency or other appropriate access by phone without long-distance charges to the user.

G. Records and Reports

Information and Referral Service providers, while at the same time preserving confidentiality, must--

1. maintain records and make reports in such a manner that identification of older persons who use the service is not revealed or accessible to anyone other than staff members assisting them;
2. maintain documentation to ensure program accountability (such as an I & R service log);
3. maintain records of follow-up indicating if the person referred was accepted for evaluation by the agency to which he/she was referred or if further referrals were necessary;
4. maintain records of services which were requested but were not available;
5. retain records as required under the Aging Block Grant Agreement.