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# N.H. to Develop Community-Based Aging and Disability Resource Centers

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The New Hampshire Institute for Health Policy and Practice, headquartered at the University of New Hampshire, has received funding to develop aging and disability resource centers across the state.

The three-year, \$800,000 grant will allow UNH to work with the state's Division of Elderly and Adult Services (DEAS) to implement a more comprehensive, front-end model to help the elderly, persons with disabilities and chronic conditions, and their families access long term supports. It is funded through the federal Agency on Aging and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

As part of the project, the institute and DEAS will evaluate existing processes for accessing long-term supports, information and counseling, as well as consumers' needs regarding service delivery across the state. Analysts will collect data and assess the volume of requests for assistance, hospital discharge patterns, demographic data and types of services sought and used, and will talk with physicians and other health care providers.

State policy-makers will use the data to reorganize current programs to be more responsive to individuals and caregiving families looking for services. "This information will inform the development of new 'one stop shopping' centers," says Amy Philbrick, NHIHPP senior policy analyst. "These centers will be located in New Hampshire communities and will provide information, counseling, referral, training, education and case management for long-term support services to those looking for these services for themselves or others."

Individuals with disabilities and chronic conditions must often negotiate a "confusing and disorganized system" to find the help they need, says Mary Maggioncalda, DEAS administrator. Their search often begins when they are facing a health care crisis.

“This is not the best time to be making these decisions,” she says. “Instead, by providing people with one place to go where they can get the information they need to access long-term supports, we can make our existing programs more efficient and help people get these services more quickly and with less frustration. We want to reach them through early intervention and help them plan for services before the crisis, and we want to provide them with the supports they need.”

The focus of this initiative -- empowering consumers and supporting family caregivers in making choices about the help they want and need -- is a major public policy issue in New Hampshire and nationally.

In 1998, the N.H. Department of Health and Human Services released *Shaping Tomorrow's Choices*, a report on long-term care which identified keeping elders in their communities as a major policy objective. During the public review of the report, consumers and caregivers asked the state to make it easier for them to find and use long term supports.

Yet according to research done by Raelene Shippee Rice, UNH professor of nursing, elders and their families are not receiving the support they need. They express difficulty in obtaining evaluation services and diagnosis, don't know what services are available, and often face barriers to access those services.

The purpose of this new grant, Philbrick says, is to bridge some of those needs by educating and promoting wider consumer choice, while also enabling more efficient use of state programs rather than developing new ones or duplicating existing programs.