

MSH-TGA RYAN WHITE QUALITY MANAGEMENT CONSUMER ROUNDTABLES ON HOUSING



In February 2016, consumer roundtables were held at three locations throughout the TGA. The purpose of holding these roundtables was to assist the Middlesex County Office of Human Services in assessing the housing-related needs of people living in Middlesex, Somerset, and Hunterdon counties, especially for people living with HIV (PLWH).

Primary Goals of the Consumer Roundtables:

- 1) Provide an opportunity for consumers to learn about services in the area
- 2) Collect data about consumers' needs in order to inform program development to better address the needs of the Ryan White community of PLWH
- 3) Help inform frontline staff about ways they can aid consumers in their efforts to acquire independent living situations for themselves

Participation



Case managers were asked to recruit PLWH who were experiencing specific housing needs. A total of 43 consumers participated in the roundtables, which were held over the course of one week in three locations: New Brunswick, Perth Amboy, and Somerville. Active participants received a gift card and a small gift for their time and contributions.

Methods



Data was collected through a brief survey (Housing Security Scale), a roundtable discussion facilitated by a member of the Quality Management team from the Institute for Families, and an evaluation of the event. Quantitative data collected using the HSS were entered into SPSS for analysis. Qualitative data gathered during the roundtable discussions were indexed and sorted by common themes.

Consumers' Suggestions:

- Factor in garnishments when calculating expendable income
- Provide assistance with budgeting
- Facilitate good tenancy workshops
- Facilitate workshops on tenant and landlord laws and regulations
- Establish housing coordinator position
- Facilitate a roommate matching service
- Establish an online resource for information about housing and housing assistance services
- Promote policies and programs that create more affordable housing

Measures



The Housing Security Scale consists of 12 items designed to assess the various factors that might present risks to a person's housing stability. An additional question added to the survey asked how much each participant paid for rent monthly. During the roundtable discussions, consumers were asked about their concerns about housing, their awareness of housing assistance services, service gaps they observed, and challenges they faced with regard to housing.

CONSUMERS' CONCERNS: AN OVERVIEW

Stress

- Looking for housing is stressful
- Keeping up with rent is stressful
- Negotiating with landlords is stressful

Costs of Housing

- Rent is expensive and growing more expensive
- Utilities often cost more than rent
- Housing costs must be balanced with other expenses of living

Poor Quality of Housing

- Sometimes safety or convenience is compromised for the sake of affordable housing
- Poorly maintained heating or plumbing systems are health risks

Tenant-Landlord Issues

- Some landlords prey on their tenants financially (e.g. charging steep fees, handling security deposit returns inappropriately, etc.)
- Some landlords are slow to address safety or maintenance issues

Lack of Adequate Services

- Extant programs are underfunded, understaffed, and ineffective
- Many programs are geographically limited to certain areas
- Some programs prevent beneficiaries' progress and growth

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