

Roundtable Discussion: Using Data to Make a Difference

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Question 1: How can we use data to help make difficult budget decisions in fiscally challenging times?

Figuring most prominently in the variety of responses from five states to this question were:

- Identify Medicaid-eligible clients to maximize this federal resource
- Analyze trends in funding and programs
- Measure outcomes through the Quality of Life Index (QOLI) or other tools to show effectiveness of services
- Assure and maintain provider responsibility for submission of data to state mental health authority
- Have an online system that is easily accessible for data entry by providers

Question 2: What data has your state used to make the case for minimizing budget cuts in specific areas? Has this approach been effective?

Six states offered the following ideas for using data to avoid budget cuts:

- Use a needs assessment to help identify disparities in care and need for maintaining funding
- A judge advocate to inspire legislators to look into serving criminal-justice population through multiple state agencies
- Use data generated by advocates (for example, Grading the States report from the National Alliance on Mental Illness) to convince legislators to increase funding for mental health
- Share client portfolios with legislators
- Publish data on service utilization on the Web and grade providers on their data submission
- Conduct a financial assessment and work with stakeholders to develop a financing plan

Question 3: With whom—consumers, families, advocates, legislators, other state agencies—could or should state mental health agencies share data to make an impact?

Several states made the following suggestions:

- Make information available to the people who make funding decisions
- Make information available to all stakeholders
- Share information broadly on a weekly (or some other consistent) basis

- Integrating cost data with service data is a powerful data quality-improvement and empowerment tool
- Share data with consumers and families on Planning Councils; teach them how to understand the data in ways that will contribute to improvement of advocacy efforts
- Form a block grant review group from the Planning Council to look more closely at the block grant and how the state mental health agency uses data
- Include stakeholders in service area authorities that meet regularly; give testimony before legislature about how mental-health services save lives
- Integrate data people and policy makers
- Data people should market themselves and available data so that state administrations can make the case for funding for mental health
- Form a Transition-Age Youth Council and look at data to quantify transition issues and establish goals
- Get stakeholders involved first in data collection and dissemination
- Use graphs, tables, and narrative to explain data so that all stakeholders can be included

Question 4: Do we have specific examples of ways in which states/providers might achieve efficiencies?

- Measuring fidelity of evidence-based practices may help keep budgets stable.
- State mental health authorities need to pass along data to support program effectiveness and need for funding
- Use data to tie outcomes to treatment