

SECTION IV

RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive assessment of the service delivery structure, operation, cost analysis, and inter-organizational dynamics of delivering Adult Protective Services (APS) in Ohio was undertaken to provide information that can be utilized for policy making, planning, restructuring the service system, and improving services. The recommendations proposed herein were developed based on the major findings from three phases of evaluation undertaken between April 2000 to June 2001. These recommendations are expected to address the current deficits in the delivery of the APS thereby improving services for APS clients in the future. The implementation of these recommendations requires commitment and leadership at the state level, as well as continued cooperation and support at the county levels from administrators and professionals who are currently responsible for the delivery of APS to the most vulnerable population of the community. Much of the recommendations address basic discrepancies among counties in the delivery of APS or lack of standardized policies and procedures. Suggested changes are grounded both in best practice models and protocols that are widely adopted by states and counties across the nation.

The recommendations that emerged from the analysis of the study's findings are discussed under six major areas of concern: structure, training, services, inter-organizational relations, funding, and statutory change. The proposed recommendations are congruent with the national consultant's suggestions for Ohio to address based on the review of the findings (Wolf, 2001). Under each area of concern, specific recommendations are made to ameliorate the concern raised by the study findings. The following is a discussion of each of the identified areas that needs attention by the state:

A. Structure

The state APS agency should create a uniform APS system across all 88 Ohio counties with the capacity to effectively address the difficult and diverse issues encountered in situations of adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Creating this system will require three fundamental changes:

- 1 The state agency with responsibility for APS law implementation should assume a visible and active leadership role in assuring capable APS service delivery and sufficient APS resources. Both the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and Ohio Department of Aging are legitimate candidates for this role, since they have important functions in the protection of vulnerable adult populations. Moreover, both have support for assuming this role among key stakeholders to the system. Whichever agency assumes the role of the state APS agency, it must regard APS as an integral part of its organizational mission, be proactive in taking appropriate steps to create and maintain a vital and responsive APS system, and emphasize collaboration with other public agencies for effectively addressing adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In addition, having one agency assume the role of the state APS agency does not negate the importance of both agencies in addressing the problem. Most of the services needed to prevent elder abuse and assist victims or caregivers once elder abuse has been determined are found within the aging network of the Ohio Department of Aging. Similarly, most of the benefits related to medical assistance and residential long-term care as well as many supportive and other services required by victims originate in the programming of the state and county departments of job and family services and their contract agencies.
- 2 The state APS agency should expand the regulations attached to APS law implementation in order to make ambiguous concepts and provisions operational, and to standardize and improve APS service delivery statewide. Among the legal concepts and provisions most in need of clarification and operationalization are the following: definitions of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and

incapacitation; roles of the designated agency; confidentiality during investigation, case planning, and service provision; and the ability of the APS agency to reveal the source of the report. Among those practices most in need of improvement and standardization are the following: qualifications of APS caseworkers; assessment instruments and procedures; caseload size and its relationship to case intensity; and APS caseworker standards of conduct, including situations which represent potential conflict of interest. Similarly, the state APS agency should encourage county use of recognized best practices in APS service provision through training, technical assistance, and incentive funding. Such practices should include use of interdisciplinary teams for assessment and clinical consultation along with the establishment of decision-making protocols for effective referral to community resources.

- 3 The state APS agency should monitor APS law implementation and compliance with regulations at the county level through regular and systematic program evaluation activities. Among established regulations should be criteria by which designated agencies are selected and used in the APS law implementation. The county-mandated APS agencies that designate other agencies for investigation and service provision should monitor the work of the designated agencies.

B. Training

The state agency responsible for implementing Ohio's Adult Protective Services (APS) law should assume the leadership role for insuring adequate and appropriate training of those persons charged with executing its provisions as well as the education of the public on the problems addressed in law. This training and education should focus on the following:

- 1 APS caseworkers and supervisors in both mandated and designated agencies should be required to complete a certificate program in order to perform APS activities. The certificate program should be specific to APS, standardized across counties, and comprehensive in scope. It should have knowledge and skill building components as well as incorporate information on understanding problem dynamics, investigation and assessment protocols, intervention strategies and resources, and techniques for handling difficult client situations.
- 2 Service providers identified as mandatory reporters in Ohio's APS law should be educated on their role and responsibilities in law implementation early in their careers. To facilitate this, information should be incorporated on the problem of adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation in the educational curricula of represented professionals and paraprofessionals. In addition, questions on the subject should be included in state professional licensure examinations.
- 3 The state APS agency, in cooperation with the state unit on aging as well as state and local adult abuse networks, should develop educational products, such as fact sheets, posters, and public service announcements, for adaptation and use by counties in public awareness campaigns on adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Moreover, the state agency should offer counties technical assistance on community education, including information on effective practices, working with the media, and obtaining local support.

C. Services

Each community has the responsibility to insure that resources exist to address the needs of persons impacted by adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Where need exists but is insufficient to justify the creation of locally specific programs, communities should come together for resource development. The role of the state agency in this regard rests primarily with securing adequate funding for services and offering

technical assistance for program development and improvement. The following three areas should receive priority in program development, because they represent critical needs and widespread gaps.

- 1 County mandated APS agencies should have 24-hour, 7-day capacity to handle reports of adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation, especially for emergency situations. Various models exist for insuring continuous access to APS, from the inclusion of APS with child protective services after hours to the use of answering services and pagers by APS personnel. Whatever model is adopted, it should be well publicized, easy to use, and responsive.
- 2 Area agencies on aging should work with county APS agencies and local adult abuse networks to develop and fund programs to fill identified service gaps. Although service gaps vary by locale, among those most frequently identified statewide are the following: transportation/escort, housing options, respite services, guardianship programs, emergency shelters, legal services, home health care, homemaker services, money management, and services for those with moderate incomes. It is the role of the aging network to lead in activities to prevent elder abuse, including the establishment and coordination of related services. Victims of adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation should be recognized as a targeted population in Ohio's aging network and given priority in service provision among contract agencies receiving Social Services Block Grant funding. National models for many programs often involve collaboration with additional systems or organizations, such as the domestic violence service system, the bar association, and hospitals. This should be an option to explore in Ohio as well in order to avoid service duplication and to use resources most efficiently.
- 3 APS caseworkers should have a broad understanding of available services and housing options in their community. They also should feel comfortable and capable accessing these resources on behalf of their clientele. APS supervisors should foster community perspective and referrals during the orientation and supervision of APS caseworkers.

D. Inter-organizational Relations

Because adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation is a complex problem, various systems and organizations are required to address it. This is evident in the number of Ohio laws dealing with some aspect of the problem, each with distinct implementing authority and intervention systems. Recognizing this, APS agencies at state and county levels should formalize relations with other public organizations and systems responsible for the problem in order to clarify roles, delineate protocols for referral and service delivery, and share resources on behalf of mutual clientele. Similarly, APS agencies should form strong linkages with nonpublic organizations and systems in order to effectively prevent and treat the problem. Some of these relationships can occur through established adult abuse networks. Implementing this recommendation requires five steps:

- 1 APS agencies should lead in the formation of adult clusters to improve the handling of cases and use of government funding when multiple public agencies are involved. Particular emphasis should be placed on working with public agencies in the aging network, mental health system, and mental retardation/ developmental disabilities system.
- 2 APS agencies should forge close relations with the domestic violence service system in order to address domestic violence in late life as an interfacing problem with elder abuse and with the criminal justice system in order to address the criminal aspects of adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The strength of these relationships will rest primarily on the ability of each system to understand and respect the other systems philosophies, purpose, and perspectives.
- 3 APS agencies should be active participants and supporters of adult abuse networks at state, regional, and county levels.
- 4 It should be the practice norm to handle APS cases involving multiple community agencies through case conferences and consultations with these agencies. The focus of interaction should be on each

agency's role and responsibility in the case as well as the best means to maintain interagency communication during service plan implementation.

- 5) County APS agencies should provide written follow-up to service providers who make reports. Follow-up should include the name of the APS caseworker assigned to investigate the report and confidentiality standards governing the release of information about the case.

E. Funding

The APS system uses various federal, state, and local funding sources. Revenues are sufficient for handling the current level of reporting and conducting related investigations in accordance with state law. The average caseload size of Ohio APS caseworkers is within national standards. (See Appendix E: Tables 10E B 13E.) However, the existing APS system is dependent on a fragile set of funding sources, such as the Social Services Block Grant, and is incapable of supporting the recommendations contained in this report without additional appropriations. The need for more revenues is especially evident in three areas and advocacy for it should come from collaborative efforts by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Ohio Department of Aging, and their local agents.

- 1 Funding is required to enhance the APS infrastructure at the state level so that sufficient staffing and other resources are in place to undertake such recommended activities as developing regulations and monitoring their compliance, creating and implementing a certificate program to train APS caseworkers, and establishing formal protocols with state authorities concerned about adult abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The current state line item for APS should be expanded for this purpose.
- 2 APS and identified service gaps should be included in the allocation agenda of senior citizen and human service levies as they are enacted or renewed in individual counties. These revenue sources offer flexibility for programming and encourage responsiveness to community need.

- 3 Substantive revenue expansion will be required at the state level under four circumstances: a) significantly increased reporting as a result of outreach effort and publicity; b) growth of the target population under APS law to include non-elderly adults; c) continued decrease in Social Services Block Grant; and d) change in institutional arrangement for the oversight of the APS program, wherein if the service delivery system is changed from a local to regional model there would be no guarantee for transfer of the Title XX dollars. The first two factors increase APS staffing needs for investigation and service provision. The second two factors require an increase in the state budget line-item. In addition, expansion of the definition of adult under the APS law would require the creation of various community services for treating the problem of abuse, neglect, and exploitation currently lacking in most Ohio locales for non-elderly adults. The nature and extent of the service gaps and the amount of funding required to fill them will vary by community.

F. Statutory Change

The state APS agency, in cooperation with state and local advocacy groups representing vulnerable adult populations- including adult abuse networks- should take the lead in proposing revisions to Ohio's APS law so that it provides protection for all adults with impairments and encourages interface with other statutory authorities concerned with the protection of this population. To accomplish this, four revisions to the APS law are required:

- 1) The definition of adult should be expanded to include all those age 18 and over with mental or physical impairments that render them unable to provide for their own care or protection. The same state agency that has the lead in implementing the APS law for elderly adults should have that role for non-elderly adults.

- 2) The list of mandatory reporters should be expanded to include those health, social, and safety service providers, such as vocational or rehabilitation counselors, in contact with younger impaired adults who are not currently identified in the law.
- 3) Reference should be made to other Ohio laws that serve to protect vulnerable adults in order to promote collaboration across systems and expand intervention strategies. Both civil and criminal laws should be included, such as the Domestic Violence law and various Homicide and Assault laws.
- 4) Law should include specific services for perpetrators and caregivers.

The proposed recommendations herein, when implemented, will ensure a quality APS program for Ohio's adult victims of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Feasibility of implementing these recommendations depends on the leadership and collaboration between the two major state agencies (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and Ohio Department of Aging) as well as cooperative efforts among elder abuse network providers at the local county level. A Task Force should be developed at the state level to initiate the process of implementing these recommendations. The creation of such a task force could potentially be the impetus for change in the current APS system in Ohio.