

IV. A. INTRODUCTION TO EXEMPLARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

This section includes summary material on the basic elements of discharge planning, as well as rules and recommendations on discharge planning from federal agencies, and samples of established discharge policies and protocols in Massachusetts. Included are several examples of how both federal and state government have translated the principles and goals of appropriate discharge planning into policy measures. The tools included in this section are examples of steps government agencies can take to create policies and practices that communicate awareness of inappropriate discharges as an issue and an expectation that recognition of the problem and response to it will be built into state and local programs.

Federal

In May 1994 the federal Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) published *Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness*. The Federal Plan was developed in response to the May 1993 Executive Order of President Clinton, in which he directed that there be a "single coordinated Federal plan for breaking the cycle of existing homelessness and preventing future homelessness."

Although the issue of discharge planning had received little attention, and although the Interagency Council became inactive until 2002, *Priority: Home!* recognized that inadequate discharge planning can contribute to homelessness among people with serious mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders. ICH established the "Interagency Work Group on Improving Discharge Planning." This group convened a Working Conference on Discharge Planning in June 1997 "to identify and build consensus for the key elements of effective discharge planning and to develop recommendations for exemplary discharge planning practice."

Experts from across the United States came together in a conference that included researchers, consumers, program directors, managed care representatives, advocates, substance abuse specialists, and social workers. The result of their focused effort is Exemplary Practices in Discharge Planning: Report and Recommendations of the Working Conference which was issued by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). [LINK to document IV. B.]

Two other examples are included from federal government acknowledgement of discharge issues. The first example is CMHS Cultural Competence Standards for Discharge Planning in Managed Care Mental Health Services [LINK to document IV. C.] These standards are intended to provide a floor for practice in mental health services provided by managed care systems.

Second, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) now requires a certification by some government applicants as to the policies and protocols in place locally to provide for discharge planning accountability and prevent the discharge into homelessness of persons in public care. The inclusion of the HUD McKinney Act Special Project Certification Form for Discharge Planning [LINK to document IV. D.]

in the annual application for HUD Homeless Assistance Grants is the result of federal advocacy by the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) in seeking to ensure that public systems of care would be accountable in applying for federal funds to serve clients of their state systems who may have been discharged into homelessness.

State

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has taken a number of steps to educate its state agencies and improve their accountability for homelessness prevention through appropriate discharge planning. One of the key processes to result was the convening in 2000 of all relevant state agencies in the Task Force on Housing and Homelessness, a multi-month process established at the direction of then Governor A. Paul Cellucci. Governor Cellucci embraced the concept of prevention and spoke publicly of the responsibility of state agencies for addressing discharge appropriately. State agencies, advocates, and providers were represented in two work groups, which focused on discharge planning and housing search. In its report, Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance Policy Report: Moving Beyond Serving the Homeless to Preventing Homelessness [LINK to document IV. E.] the discharge planning work group gave attention to policies and procedures in correctional facilities, as well as human services agencies that provide custodial, residential, or inpatient services. Included are selected excerpts from the working group's reports on the corrections and mental health systems.

Because the homelessness of people with mental illness has long been emphasized in public discourse, the policies to prevent the homelessness of this vulnerable population are particularly important. The advent of managed care systems and public-private contract relationships provides an opportunity for accountability, even for those providers at arm's length from state funds. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) has a policy of "zero tolerance" for discharges of individuals from inpatient care to homelessness. It holds both its public facilities and private vendors accountable for outcomes for homeless people, as described in Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Discharge Protocol [LINK to document IV. F.].