Promising Practice: Increasing ADRC Employees' Awareness of Medicare "Help" Programs

The purpose of this tip sheet is to provide promising practices to help agencies increase the number of Medicare Savings Plans and Low Income Subsidies applications.

Who is benefiting from this promising practice?

Low-income seniors and people with disabilities that may qualify for the Medicare Part D Extra Help/Low-Income Subsidy or the Medicare Savings Programs but are not currently enrolled.

A South Carolina Intervention:

The Catawba Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) in South Carolina is an organization for older adults and people with disabilities that helps those individuals to find information and resources about services and programs. All of the center's staff have two primary purposes: delivering information over the phones and going out into the field to increase outreach.

The Catawba ADRC wanted to increase outreach to low-income individuals who are eligible for Medicare Savings Plans (MSP) and Low-Income Subsidies (LIS/Extra Help), both programs which provide much needed financial relief. The organization hypothesized that if they could increase the number of MSP and LIS applications being submitted, then their overall numbers would increase. Keeping in mind that not all employees have in-depth knowledge of the MSP and LIS programs, their innovative idea proved that employees don't need to know a lot about the programs in order to know if someone is eligible for them.

The Catawba ADRC created a reproducible template for staff to use internally to gather information from every single caller, regardless of what they were originally calling about. The form (see figure 1.) is located on each employee's desktop and is also available in paper copy when screening in the field. This form includes six items, one of which asks about income. The income eligibility limits are clearly listed next to the item, and upon entering an income which meets the "Extra Help" income eligibility into the electronic template, a pop up screen flashes to signal to the screener to start a conversation about eligibility. Using this tool, even if people call in with unrelated issues—such as a need for dentures or eye glasses—the screener can now identify if the individuals is eligible, and the individual may now have access to some extra income.

An Illinois Intervention:

The Illinois Department on Aging's Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is a statewide health insurance service that provides free counseling for Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers. The SHIP staff deliver information over the phone and conduct outreach in the field.

The Illinois SHIP Office designed a giant, easily reproducible poster with MSP and LIS income information to hang at each employee's desk. The simple act of hanging this easy-to-reference poster (see figure 2.) allowed the organization to keep the numbers in front of all of their staff all of the time, thereby making it easier to screen callers for potential eligibility.

What was the result?

By getting the income eligibility numbers in front of all of their staff all of the time through posters and a universal internal template, the number of applications dramatically increased at the Catawba ADRC and the Illinois SHIP Office. Any staff that had little knowledge of MSP/LIS programs was able to catch potentially eligible individuals and direct them to the right person on their initial phone calls. These small internal changes made the screening process more effective and efficient.

Materials:

There are very few materials needed to put the promising practices mentioned above into action, because they are simple and affordable changes. To replicate these practices, you would need:

- Eligibility limits
- Posters with income eligibility
- ADRC application link on desktop for easy accessibility
- Downloadable ADRC application with income triggers

Figure 1.

An example of the form with income triggers (see red arrow).
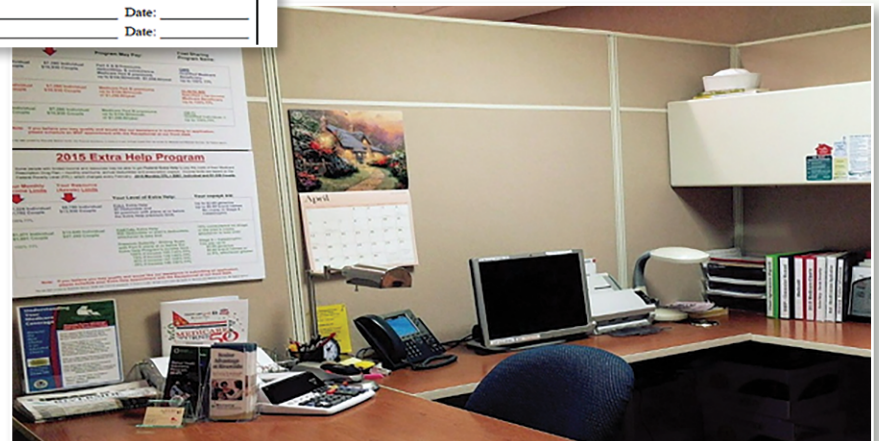
Figure 2.

An example of the income eligibility posters posted at each desktop.