

NATIONAL CONSUMER ADVISORY BOARD

SUMMARY OF HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS CONSUMER GOVERNANCE REQUIREMENTS

Many Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) projects receive federal funding as part of the Consolidated Health Center program and are referred to as HCH grantees. Other projects, such as Community Health Centers and Migrant Health Centers, also receive this funding, also referred to as *Section 330* funding for the section of the Public Health Services Act that establishes the program.

As a condition of its federal funding, a Board of Directors that represents the community served by the project must govern a Consolidated Health Center. Under the law, the Board of Directors must:

- Be comprised of a majority (at least 51%) of individuals (“consumers”) who are being served by the health center and who, as a group, represent the individuals being served by the health center
- Meet at least once a month
- Select the services to be provided by the health center
- Schedule the hours during which such services will be provided
- Approve the health center’s annual budget
- Approve the selection of a director (Program Director or CEO) for the health center
- Establish general policies for the health center, except in the case of a governing board of a public center
- Approve applications for subsequent grants for the health center

The law allows an HCH project to obtain a waiver for the *consumer majority* and *monthly meeting* requirements if the project is not part of a Community Health Center. About half of the HCH projects qualify for a waiver, which exempts them from those two requirements listed above.

Waivers are available because the circumstances of many homeless persons’ lives make active participation on a Board of Directors very difficult. In applying for a waiver, however, an HCH project must establish plans for obtaining guidance from the homeless individuals it is intended to serve. Under their waivers, HCH projects have created a number of ways for consumers to influence decisions by HCH projects. These include:

- Including some consumers on the Board of Directors (even if not a majority)
- Establishing a Consumer Advisory Board (CAB) made up of consumers, which provides advice to the Board of Directors in a regular, formal way
- Conducting regular focus groups to learn from consumers about how the program is meeting- or not meeting- their needs
- Distributing questionnaires or “patient satisfaction survey” to HCH patients
- Asking consumers to do regular outreach to other homeless persons, inquiring about their health care needs and experiences, and compiling this information

Community Health Centers with HCH funding are required to have at least one homeless consumer on their Board of Directors, and should use additional approaches like those described above to help assure that they are getting broad-based input from homeless consumers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Some HCH projects are working toward meeting the consumer majority requirement, and this is a development that we strongly encourage. As a step in this development, many projects develop their own CABs. More information on forming a CAB and a fuller description on how to strengthen consumer involvement in an HCH project is available in the Consumer Advisory Board Manual, available at: http://www.nhchc.org/NCAB/NCAB_Manual-rev-Jan10.pdf.

The main purpose of consumer majority Boards is to be able to gain insight into the concerns and needs of the HCH clients. One method of obtaining this information is the distribution of questionnaires. Sample outreach forms and questionnaires, in English and Spanish, have been created for Consumer Advisory Boards to use when inquiring about the health care needs and issues of individuals who are experiencing homelessness. These templates are available from the **National Consumer Advisory Board (NCAB)**. Contact an NCAB representative directly by emailing ncab@nhchc.org.

National Consumer Advisory Board
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
P.O. Box 60427
Nashville TN, 37206-0427
615/226-2292

The **National Health Care for the Homeless Council** is federally funded to provide training for the consumers, staff, and Board members of all HCH grantees nationwide and offers both on-site and online trainings on consumer involvement, CABs, and other related topics. A training request form can be submitted online at <http://www.nhchc.org/trainingrequest.html>. The Council can also provide more targeted technical assistance (TA) on the topic of consumer governance, which focuses on the specific issues/concerns faced by a HCH program. More information on TA services and the request form for TA can be found online at <http://www.nhchc.org/TArequest.html>.

To locate available resources on topics including medical respite care, integrated care coordination, HCH governance and planning, policy and advocacy, and adapting clinical practice, visit the National Health Care for the Homeless Council website at www.nhchc.org.