



NY Connects: Choices for Long Term Care
Selected Highlights from Around the State
June 2008

Overview of NY Connects

In 2006 the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), in partnership with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), established **NY Connects: Choices in Long Term Care** as an essential vehicle in rebalancing long term care in New York State.

NY Connects is a statewide program that has established consumer-centered entry points in nearly every county throughout the State, where individuals can obtain comprehensive, accurate, and unbiased Information and Assistance on long term care. Through this program, consumers, which include older adults, and adults and children with disabilities, and their caregivers, can make informed choices about long term care based on their real needs. **NY Connects** is available to people in need of long term care regardless of age, income or payment source.

Long term care refers to medical and non-medical support services needed to improve or maintain one's health and/or daily function. Such services may be provided in the individual's home or other community-based and residential settings. Examples of long term care include transportation, respite, home delivered meals, personal care services, and home modifications and repairs.

Information and Assistance on long term care services and resources can be provided through the county call center, on-site locations, off-site consumer visits, or a web site.

NY Connects promotes independence and dignity, and supports those in need of long term care to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible.

NYSOFA and NYSDOH developed a total of 57 contracts during the first year of **NY Connects** for the counties to establish the program. Oswego County was the only county that chose not to participate.

The second year of **NY Connects** focuses on stabilization and enhancement. The local programs are working to advance their delivery of Information and Assistance, conduct public education and promotion campaigns, further develop data collection and evaluation systems, and address identified gaps and weaknesses in the local long term care system.

There have been many exciting and important developments that have occurred at the local level. Selected accomplishments are highlighted here.

Creating Partnerships and Collaborations

NY Connects has brought together many local government agencies and other entities that had never formally collaborated. In every county a lead agency is responsible for the operations and administrative oversight of the local **NY Connects** program. The lead agency, whether it is the Area Agency on Aging



(AAA) or the local Department of Social Services (DSS), is responsible for making sure that formal relationships are established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the AAA, DSS, and any other agencies that are deemed appropriate by the county. These agencies must work together collaboratively, as a single voice and identity for the county.

- Rockland County has capitalized on strategic collaboration to establish **NY Connects**. Information Rockland (Info Rock), the county's existing information line, has been successfully transitioned to operate as **NY Connects** – in conjunction with their Senior Help Line and 211. All are in operation without any duplication of service reported thus far.
- In Schuyler County, Families First, an existing Single Point of Entry program for children and families services, was expanded to serve two new populations: older adults and those with physical disabilities, therefore reinventing Families First as **NY Connects** through strategic partnerships with the local DSS and AAA.
- Delaware County held a "retreat" (a one-day conference) for provider agencies in the community to solicit their input and feedback on **NY Connects**. They requested that each agency bring information on all the services they offer, as well as their intake, assessment and referral forms to help eliminate the duplication that many consumers face. The retreat brought agencies together and encouraged conversations that enabled them to review, analyze, and identify gaps and duplications of services.
- **NY Connects** has also enabled counties to form relationships with entities such as Independent Living Centers and 211. Onondaga, Schoharie, Delaware and Otsego Counties, as well as other counties across the state, have actively involved the Independent Living Center that serves their county in the planning and implementation of their local **NY Connects** program.
- Nassau County plans to use faculty at the local universities and colleges to design evaluation tools for their **NY Connects** program.

Provision of Information and Assistance

During the first year of **NY Connects**, counties were responsible for developing an infrastructure that would allow for the provision of Information and Assistance on long term care options to consumers, caregivers, and health care professionals. The great need for **NY Connects** has already been demonstrated by the sheer number of individuals who have contacted **NY Connects** for long term care Information and Assistance. The number of calls is expected to increase as more resources are targeted on public education and media campaigns in the second year of **NY Connects** implementation.

- Forty-nine (49) counties report that they are operational and providing Information and Assistance on long term care options to individuals in the community.
- Forty-one (41) counties reported nearly 20,000 contacts to **NY Connects** during a three month period of time.
- After a targeted outreach campaign to local long term care providers, Albany County received nearly 2,000 phone calls during their first quarter of operation. Call volume remained consistent throughout all three months. A majority of their contacts were from professionals/providers. Most people reported having learned of **NY Connects** from a local agency or human service provider.
- Onondaga County reported 240 phone contacts during the most recent quarter and Ontario County reported 93 contacts.
- Broome County reported over 2,400 contacts in the first quarter of Year Two; roughly 15% were from private pay individuals.
- The top ten types of Information provided reported by 41 counties during the first quarter of the second year were: Utility Payment Assistance, Personal Care, Home Delivered Meals, Health



Insurance Information & Counseling, Case/Care Management, Home Health Care, Medicaid, Medicare Information/Counseling, Medical Transportation, and Advocacy. In addition to providing information on home and community based topics, **NY Connects** program frequently provided information on topics related to consumer empowerment, such as Personal Emergency Response Systems and Legal services.

- Niagara County decided to add staff to handle the increase in calls they have experienced since the inception of their **NY Connects** program.

Public Education

Counties also began developing their public education and media campaigns to increase public awareness of their **NY Connects** program. They used public service announcements and developed promotional materials to disseminate information on **NY Connects** and the valuable services this program provides. To date 49 counties have started working on their public education campaign.

- Erie County developed a comprehensive and informative website which contains information on the long term care services and supports available in their community. The **NY Connects** website can be accessed at: <http://www.erie.gov/nyconnects/>.
- Erie County also developed an educational guide for consumers that will assist them in making decisions regarding their long term care needs. This seven page guide provides a definition of long term care and discusses the likelihood that one might need long term care services in the future. It also describes the types and ranges of care needs amongst consumers, as well as the variety of services available to meet those needs.
- Onondaga County distributed an informational packet on **NY Connects** to more than 500 physicians' offices. The **NY Connects** packet included a letter from the Onondaga Commissioner of Long Term Care, which explains **NY Connects** and offers the physicians an opportunity to request a presentation on **NY Connects** for their staff. The mailing has already prompted several phone calls and a presentation request.
- Broome, Onondaga, and Ontario created a TV ad on **NY Connects**, and Sullivan was successful in getting a local newspaper to promote their **NY Connects** program. Orange County is planning to advertise their **NY Connects** program on a local radio program.
- Chemung, Herkimer, Orange, Rockland, Broome, Onondaga, Ontario, Seneca, Steuben and Sullivan are but a sample of counties that have developed a brochure on **NY Connects** and are disseminating these widely as part of their outreach and public education campaigns.
- St Lawrence County is distributing **NY Connects** pens and has produced **NY Connects** banners to display at presentations, fairs and other such outreach events.
- Orange is using magnets as a means to promote the program and is collaborating with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to strategically place **NY Connects** ads in their waiting room, in public view.
- Ontario County created **NY Connects** flashlight key chains, pad folios, mugs, notepads, calendar, and pens. Onondaga County developed **NY Connects** chip clips and pens. Broome County is distributing canvas bags with the **NY Connects** logo.
- A promotional campaign is in progress that promotes **NY Connects** in both Broome and its neighbor, Tioga County.
- Schoharie County was able to get Public Service Announcements on **NY Connects** on local cable. In addition, they issued press releases on **NY Connects** and conducted interviews on **NY Connects** with newspapers.



- Monroe County developed **NY Connects** posters and informational cards, which they plan to distribute to all provider agencies and pharmacies.
- Westchester County is in negotiations to purchase bus placards for **NY Connects**.

Creating Efficiencies in the Long Term Care Systems

To achieve a unified **NY Connects** identity and to draw upon the unique staff expertise among each of the partner agencies, counties have employed various strategies. Some of these include but are not limited to: the co-location of staff from partner agencies to operate out of one **NY Connects** office and the use of communication systems that provide for the seamless intake and/or transfer of incoming calls between agencies.

- In Montgomery and Tompkins Counties, staff in two separate locations will share responsibility for incoming calls to the **NY Connects** toll-free line through use of the latest and most up-to-date telecommunication and information technology.
- Cattaraugus, Washington and Schuyler Counties' **NY Connects** programs mirror an approach taken by a majority of federally sponsored Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs). They have moved their AAA and LDSS staff into one location (co-location) to conduct the operations for **NY Connects**.
- In Cattaraugus County, **NY Connects** is made up of a comprehensive, cross-agency team consisting of an aging services aide, social welfare examiner, former DSS worker, Registered Nurse, former AAA caseworker, and a receptionist, all of whom work together in one office, in a separate location apart from the different agencies that they represent. Having a well-rounded staff representation in an independently located **NY Connects** office better ensures that people get the long term care services based on their individual needs.
- In Washington and Westchester Counties, all of their Information and Assistance staff will obtain certification by the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS), a federal requirement of ADRC participation.
- In Lewis County, the Director of the Local Department of Social Services has already noticed an improvement in the case worker's ability to more effectively manage case volume as a result of the improved coordination from the creation of **NY Connects**.
- Oneida County has made better use of case management staff by strengthening their Information and Assistance functions. As a result, **NY Connects** case managers are able to spend more time on case management because they are spending less time collecting information from the consumer.
- Warren-Hamilton has successfully co-located their Department of Social Services and Office for the Aging staff within a consolidated Central Intake Unit that is now **NY Connects**. The three key partner agencies (DSS, OFA, and Health Services) are coordinating their efforts through use of the same web-based information technology program that collects information on consumers and contacts to the program.
- During a recent site visit, Washington County reported several positive outcomes of **NY Connects**. The County noted that since they streamlined long term care services, there has been a greater awareness of the Adult Protective Services program. Moreover, they quickly became aware of the rate of duplication amongst service providers prior to the co-location of staff. As a result, collaboration and learning has increased amongst staff and across Departments. The County reports that they are quickly overcoming biases and difficulties related to change and are now more focused on the greater good.



Establishing Long Term Care Councils

Every county was charged with creating a Local Long Term Care Council to assist in the evaluation of the local long term care system, identifying gaps and duplication in the system and making recommendations to address identified needs. The invaluable information garnered from the Long Term Care Council will allow each county, as well as the State, to identify and address systemic problems and make improvements to the long term care system. Across the State the total membership of the local councils is over 1,440.

- Fifty-two (52) counties have established a Long Term Care Council, comprised of consumers, caregivers, advocates, providers, and local government representatives. For example, the Albany County **NY Connects** has standing members from all relevant local government agencies, adult day care and home care programs, nursing facilities, Caregiver Association, Alzheimer's Association, Paraprofessional Health Care Institute, Catholic Charities, the Medical Society of Albany County, Albany County Executive's Office, Consumer Directed Choices, the Independent Living Center that serves the region, the Department of Children, Youth and Families/Division for Children with Special Needs, and most importantly, people in their community who use long term care services.
- Rockland County has a large representation of consumers and caregivers on their Council: 14 out of their 35 members are consumers or caregivers.
- In Cattaraugus County, the County chairman, administrator and two legislators are ex-officio members of the Long Term Care Council.
- In Delaware County, members of the Long Term Care Council visited peer counties that had established point of entry-like programs in order to learn best practices for planning their **NY Connects** model. The Council also decided to form a sub-committee to write a white paper to be shared with the State and other counties that specifically identifies barriers to accessing long term care services in their county, such as lack of affordable housing, and gives recommendations to address those barriers.
- Westchester County reported an increase in requests from providers to become members of the Long Term Care Council and as a result, has established three sub-committees related to systems reform.
- The Orange County Long Term Care Council dedicated a monthly meeting to local long term care systems analysis and promoted it as a "Gaps Analysis Workshop." According to the **NY Connects** Program Coordinator, "Local providers were invited to participate and discuss consumer needs, obstacles, service gaps, targeted areas of action, and potential action steps." The Council will share findings with NYSOFA and NYSDOH to solicit feedback and guidance on next steps.
- Erie County's Long Term Care Council has created four subcommittees that will address the following topic areas: Marketing, Membership, Outcomes and Strategic Planning. The Strategic Planning Committee determined that a consultant needed to be hired in order to assist the Council with the process of analyzing the local long term care system.
- Franklin County is forming a subcommittee to examine the impact of increased energy costs, particularly next winter.
- Fulton County's Long Term Care Council organized a one-day expo called "Caring Services Expo" on April 17, 2008. They provided long term care information, including information on Alzheimer's, to the community. Approximately 150 people attended.