

Essential Services for PLWH/As

The People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWH/A) Committee of the Greater Baltimore HIV Health Services Planning Council has identified five core medical services and five support services that are essential to accessing primary medical care and the overall mental and physical wellbeing of consumers.

The five core medical services are early intervention services (EIS), outpatient ambulatory health service (OAHS)/primary medical care, the AIDS drug assistance program (ADAP), case management and mental health; the support services are housing, food bank/home delivered meals, transportation, psychosocial and emergency financial assistance (EFA).

It is the PLWH/A committee's belief that without the support services consumers would be prevented from seeking and maintaining the essential medical services that they need to maintain a high quality life with HIV/AIDS.

Each of the core medical services, funded by the reauthorized Ryan White Treatment Modernization Act (Ryan White), is a critical component of the continuum of care for consumers. EIS, which includes counseling and testing activities, allows for the identification of testing and diagnosing of positive individuals who can then be linked to care.

As PLWH/As are linked to care, the availability of outpatient ambulatory health services becomes critical: whether funded through Part A or other programs, such as Medicaid, all PLWH/As need to receive proper treatment, including HIV medications, to survive.

The high cost of HIV medications often poses a barrier to care for consumers, especially those eligible for Ryan White services. The AIDS Drug Assistance Program, funded by Ryan White Part B, helps low- to moderate-income PLWH/As purchase the HIV medications that are essential to maintaining treatment, ensuring an improved quality of life and helping individuals manage their HIV/AIDS.

Case management services continue to be the best way to inform consumers about the variety of available medical and support services/programs. Case management also links consumers to long-term services that enable them to transition off Ryan White services.

Mental health is another critical component of the continuum of care as it is common for consumers to experience depression when first diagnosed with

Core Medical Services:

- Early intervention service.
- Outpatient ambulatory health service.
- AIDS drug assistance program.
- Case management.
- Mental health.

Support Services:

- Short-term housing.
- Food bank/home delivered meals.
- Medical transportation.
- Psychosocial.
- Emergency financial assistance.

HIV/AIDS; mental health issues can obstruct the seeking and maintaining of primary medical care.

There are several support services and programs available to PLWHA, many of which are unknown to Ryan White consumers. It has been shown that greater access to these support services positively affects a consumer's chances of accessing and maintaining treatment. Case management is vital to helping positive individuals secure services.

The committee identified housing – whether provided through Ryan White, Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA), section eight or the Baltimore housing disability program – as one of the most important support services, because PLWH/As without housing or stable living conditions are less likely to seek or maintain treatment.

Food bank/home delivered meals are needed by consumers who are medically unable to prepare their own meals or shop for groceries: if consumers are unable to fix their meals, then keeping their next medical appointment will not be a top priority. Furthermore, the food bank/home delivered meals ensures that PLWH/As will have access to a nutritious meal, which will result in greater physical wellbeing.

Many consumers lack adequate means of transportation and, therefore, have a difficult time attending medical and/or support service appointments, which directly impacts their ability to adhere to treatment. Transportation services, funded by Ryan White or offered by the MTA mobility program, alleviate this problem by helping consumers reach their treatment-related destinations.

There is an ongoing need for psychosocial support for PLWH/As, because HIV infection often can result in stigma and fear. Psychosocial support addresses the ongoing psychological and social problems of PLWH/As and those around them; it helps them make informed decisions and better cope with the disease.

For some, living with HIV/AIDS means living from one crisis to the next: consumers are constantly tasked with balancing barely adequate income, intermittent health problems and unexpected life events. Therefore, EFA serves as a critical safety net for consumers by preventing eviction and the loss of utilities, and by helping to pay for medication.

By ensuring that these core and support services are always funded, PLWH/As will continue to live long and healthy lives.