Recommendations for Improving Communication between APS and Reporters

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Reporting elder mistreatment is critical to identifying and resolving cases of abuse but several barriers, including inadequate communication between Adult Protective Services (APS) and reporters, discourage consistent reporting. Without feedback from APS, reporters are left uncertain if their concerns were valid. At the same time, APS must consider the legality, ethics, and feasibility of sharing information with reporters. To help address these challenges, we conducted a two-year research study to better understand the barriers and facilitators to APS-reporter communication. This study included a national environmental scan of APS feedback policies and practices followed by a detailed case study in Massachusetts of recent policy changes affecting APS-reporter communication. The environmental scan involved reviewing publicly available information, conducting a secondary analysis of data from focus groups with Emergency Medical Services providers and APS staff in Texas and Massachusetts, and conducting interviews (N=32) with state APS leaders (N=44). The case study in Massachusetts also included a review of administrative data to describe trends in reporting before, during, and following policy changes as well as comprehensive interviews and focus groups (N=10) with APS agency staff (N=16) and mandated reporters (N=14).

Analyses revealed three overarching themes related to whether, when, and how APS shares information with reporters. Using these results, we developed a model illustrating factors that contribute to APS decision-making about sharing information with reporters. We then conducted a series of workshops with APS staff and leaders in four states to introduce the model and gain further insight about the problem and strategies to address it. Based on input from workshop participants along with a diverse expert advisory board, we developed a set of recommendations for improving communication between APS and reporters. The recommendations are organized by the specific stage in the reporting process in which they should be implemented (intake and screening, case investigation, or case closure), the type of feedback APS should provide

(procedural, substantive, a combination of both, or case-by-case determination), and the type of reporter who should receive the feedback (non-professionals with brief involvement, non-professionals with ongoing involvement, professionals with brief involvement, or professionals with ongoing involvement). Each recommendation describes the goals for sharing the feedback, the information to include in the feedback, and examples for how APS can implement the recommended strategy. To learn more about the recommendations please see the resource "Adult Protective Services and Reporter Communication: Recommendations for Improving Practice."

Additionally, APS leaders in states like Oklahoma, which participated in the workshop, are excited about the opportunity to improve workflow and strengthen relationships with reporters. Following the workshop, Oklahoma developed an approach to implementing some recommended strategies. The need to improve communication between APS and reporters cannot be overemphasized, particularly in light of the recently proposed APS regulations released by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), which include feedback and information-sharing. Reporters of elder mistreatment are critical to the prevention, identification, and response to elder mistreatment. We are delighted to work with any state or agency looking for guidance to implement these recommendations. Please contact the project director, Dr. Lees Haggerty at KLees@edc.org if you have any questions.