



Alberta Disabilities Forum

"A United Voice"

Communication and the Newly Eligible Home Care Client

Issue Newly eligible Home Care recipients do not receive adequate explanation of the Home Care services they are eligible for.

ADF's Position Newly eligible Home Care recipients must be provided with complete, clear, consistent and accessible explanations (written, verbal, or in alternate format) of the services they are eligible for.

Background The ADF Health Working Group's focus group raised the issue of the need for clearer communication between agencies and clients in the initial stages of Home Care contact. While ADF realizes Home Care agencies are working to ensure their clients are informed and educated about the services they are eligible for, the focus group discussions identified some gaps in communication, particularly for newly eligible clients.

"As a client ... I find it hard to keep up with what's happening, what services are available, and how to access them."

*Barb Houston
Focus Group participant*

First of all, participants in the focus group felt penalized or discriminated against if they were not able to immediately identify their specific needs. Newly eligible individuals are often unsure of the limitations that their new situations will impose on their lives. Overwhelmed by the emotional and psychological impact of their situation, they are not always able to accurately assess their needs or the supports that they may already have in place. At the initial assessment, the individuals are still so bewildered by the changes in their lives that they cannot absorb all of the information and options. Even when they have lived with their disability for some time, clients will not always be aware of the changing nature of their needs.

Also, participants in the focus group felt they were not being made aware of all the services available to them, and so their understanding of their options was based on incomplete or inadequate information. If information is not fully disclosed by the Home Care agency, recipients of its services will not be able to make educated assessments of their situations. For example, individuals who are not informed of the services they are eligible for frequently rely too heavily on their families and friends for on-going personal care. While we all like to help our friends and family in times of need, the on-going, long term expectations that can develop in a caregiver relationship can change the dynamics of the family relationship, placing undue strain on those involved.

Finally, Home Care services seem more available and accessible to individuals who are better able to advocate for themselves. People who are less informed, less vocal, less educated or unable to make themselves heard are not always receiving the same services as people who can advocate for themselves.

Alberta Disabilities Forum believes that by committing to clear, complete and accurate communication in their initial contact with clients, Home Care agencies will develop stronger relationships with their clients. These strong relationships will lead to people with disabilities living full, independent lives in their homes, participating fully in their care.

Recommendations

To resolve the issues outlined in this paper, we believe the government of Alberta, through the Regional Health Authorities and in consultation with consumers and stakeholder groups, needs to:

1. Provide newly eligible Home Care recipients and, where appropriate, their families with complete, clear, and fully accessible written explanations of all the services they are eligible for. Persons with disabilities who are Home Care recipients will participate in the creation of the written documentation.
2. Provide newly eligible Home Care recipients and, where appropriate, their families with complete, clear, and accessible verbal explanations of all the services they are eligible for.
3. Provide information in a range of alternate formats (e.g. audio tapes, interpreters, other languages).
4. Forward newly eligible client information to other health care professionals (e.g. doctors, nurses, etc.).
5. Upon request, provide newly eligible Home Care recipients with an advocate familiar with the Home Care system to accompany them to their meetings with the agency.
6. Provide follow-up contact with newly eligible Home Care recipients to ensure the care they are receiving meets their needs.