

**Issue 18**

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● Issue 18 2012



## TOPIC WATCH

Each month we will feature a different topic; expanding the knowledge, resources, and peer networking in targeted areas. These target areas will include workforce development, transition, supported education, leadership, organizational development, sustainability, and others as they are identified.

## The Role of Consumer Run Organizations in Helping Persons with Mental Health Needs in a Changing Health Care Environment

Americans are all asking questions and looking for answers regarding where and how they will receive health care services under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Much of what they hear is second-hand and laden with political influences. There are multiple approaches for organizations to contribute to the well-being of consumers of mental health services. Consumer run organizations are uniquely poised to assist other consumers of mental health services in planning and navigating the changing mental health environment. In a peer-to-peer environment, consumer organizations can be one of the first places persons with mental illness turn to for answers.

Organizations may see an increase in calls, as consumers begin to search for information and answers about the impact of the ACA on their ability to access services, treatments, and supports. It will be critical for all consumer run organizations to guide callers to resources that are credible and that can provide them with answers to their specific and individuated needs. A list of resources, contact information, and guidance on how to ask and gain credible information will help consumers to narrow their search and find reliable answers to their questions.

In addition, helping consumers understand changes and what they will need to learn to ensure their needs are met will require an organized and systematic approach. Page two of this Focus provides a form that can be helpful in determining changes and needs within an emerging health care reform system. Encouraging use of this form or something similar will allow consumer run organizations an opportunity to promote strategic approaches to researching and locating answers regarding mental health services.

Consumer run organizations may also opt to develop or revise their program to become a Consumer Assistance Program. These programs, which may become eligible for funding through the ACA in the future, are designed to educate consumers about their rights and responsibilities in relation to the ACA, assist consumers in resolving complaints, and provide data, information, and feedback to all ACA stakeholders about the needs and outcomes of targeted populations. Because consumer run assistance programs are independent of agencies, insurance companies, and health plans, they have the potential to impact service access and change at a variety of levels.

**For more information  
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## Affordable Care Act: Getting Answers to Your Questions about Service and Treatment Changes

Use this form to compare the services and treatments you currently receive with how that might change after full implementation of the ACA. The bottom section allows you to see if other services you need but do not have at this time will be made available to you.

<b>Current Services and Treatments ( Include specific treatments and medications)</b>	<b>Who You Will Contact to See if This Will Change</b>	<b>Answer: What You Will Receive after Full Implementation of the ACA</b>
<b>Other Treatments or Services you do not receive but Need</b>	<b>Who You Will Contact to See if These Will Be Available</b>	<b>Answer: What You Can Receive after Full Implementation of the ACA</b>