Enhancing Coordination of Behavioral Health Services after Superstorm Sandy: Planning for Future Disasters

Victims of natural disasters are often at higher risk of acute or chronic behavioral health issues such as post-traumatic stress, depression, and suicide. While disaster-related issues subside over time, evidence shows that victims can experience a prolonged period of elevated risk, especially those with pre-existing chronic behavioral health issues. Elderly victims are at greater risk of deteriorating health, depression, and increased isolation.

Project Overview

Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. (HQSI), the federally-designated quality improvement organization for New Jersey, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, is working on a project to help selected communities affected by Superstorm Sandy develop targeted, community-based approaches to future disasters. This project aims to:
- Increase Medicare-covered depression screenings among at-risk beneficiaries residing in the 10 targeted communities
- Use behavioral health profiles based on Medicare data to enhance community capacity for coordination of behavioral health services during and after a disaster

HQSI Actions

- Get subject matter expert (SME) feedback on profiles and project activities
- Help local champions, providers, and stakeholders use the profiles to:
  - Enhance community capacity (i.e., identify opportunities for improvement)
  - Facilitate self-direction
  - Implement disaster planning activities to enhance care continuity/services for those at risk

Outcomes

HQSI expects the project to: (1) increase Medicare depression screening rates, (2) expand community capacity to address disaster-related behavioral health issues across the continuum of care, and (3) encourage communities to prepare for future disasters through action and sustainability plans.

For additional information, visit our website at www.hqsi.org. Click on the Superstorm Sandy tab at the top of the home page.