



**RYAN WHITE CARE COUNCIL  
MINORITY ADVOCACY COMMITTEE  
SPRING OAKS – TAMPA  
FRIDAY, JANUARY 11, 2008  
9:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.**

**MINUTES**

- CALL TO ORDER** The meeting was called to order by Georgette King, Chair, at 9:10 a.m.
- ATTENDANCE** Members Present: Ramon Baez, Georgette King, Catheline Lamour, Marylin Merida, John Melartin, Paul Watkins, Sherri White
- Members Absent: Maria Aponte, Ramon Benitez, Heather Clayton, Lolita Emanuel-Brown, Janet Kitchen, Patrick Mercier, Mellita Mills-Kendrick, Rachel Parks
- Guests Present: Josefina Campos, Penny Griffith, Jean Jones, Maxwell Jones, Lewis Williams
- Grantee Staff Present: No Grantee staff members were present.
- Health Councils Staff Present: Nicole Brown
- CHANGES TO AGENDA** No changes were made to the agenda.
- ADOPTION OF MINUTES** The minutes from December were not approved because a quorum was not reached.
- CARE COUNCIL REPORT** There was no Care Council meeting held in January.
- COMMITTEE REPORTS** John Melartin, MAC co-Chair, stated that at the Resource Prioritization & Allocation Recommendations Committee (RPARC) meeting Aubrey Arnold announced that there is no more funding in the emergency financial services category. This service category will not be funded for the upcoming

program year.

**MAI PROVIDER REPORTS**

There were no MAI (Minority AIDS Initiative) provider reports given.

**MAI STANDARDS OF CARE DOCUMENTS**

The review of the MAI standards of care documents was tabled.

**PRISON RELEASE PROGRAM**

Members spoke at length about issues related to breakdowns in the handling of referrals being made for HIV positive individuals who are being released from Florida's prison system. It was emphasized that while there are currently several programs working with HIV positive people in the local jails in our Total Service Area (TSA), the HIV positive people who are being returned from prisons across the state are completely different people who have not had access to those resources and supports.

Recently the Florida Department of Corrections (DOC) reported that approximately three hundred HIV positive ex-offenders were returned to our TSA in 2006. Georgette noted that it should be assumed that the same number of HIV positive individuals entered our TSA annually during each of the previous and subsequent years. Due to the DOC policy to test inmates upon their release instead of their entry into the prison system, these HIV positive people either only find out about their status a couple of months before their release, or have had limited medical care while in prison and are therefore at high viral loads upon release. The DOC makes a referral to an agency in our TSA prior to the ex-offenders release, but those first primary care and case management appointments are often missed due to the ex-offenders' need to prioritize other more immediate concerns such as employment and housing and a lack of follow-up from the agency that received that initial referral. Ex-offenders are provided with documentation from the DOC that allows them six months of eligibility while they work with service providers to gather the documents needed to recertify at the end of that six month period. Concern was expressed again that the agencies that have been receiving those referrals have not been following-up with those individuals, and are therefore not engaging them in healthcare and other supportive services.

It was noted that several national studies have shown that the failure to engage newly released HIV positive ex-offenders in care disproportionately impacts low income Black and Latino communities, as well as other disenfranchised groups, due to

the disproportionate rate of incarceration among Black and Latino men. That impact is compounded by the lack of resources to provide ex-offenders with linkages to employment and housing and inadequate healthcare access and prevention interventions in those communities. The additional drain on our TSA's Ryan White service dollars, due to the new infections among out-of-care ex-offenders' male and female sex and needle use partners, was briefly discussed.

Georgette reported that Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach Counties have a successful prison release program that aggressively case manages people that are newly released. It was noted that it is often impossible for receiving agencies to provide HIV education or other supports prior to their release, since they are housed at facilities across Florida, but they could be mailed a 'welcome' packet of information from the agency in an attempt to build an initial connection. Members also stated that agencies must work more aggressively to follow-up on the referrals that they are receiving from the DOH once the individual reaches the TSA and thereby do more to engage ex-offenders in supportive services that could help the individual get basic survival needs met. That process would help establish a relationship with the HIV case management agency.

The committee approved of a statement drafted by Georgette that outlines the prison release issues and affirms the committee's establishment of an ad hoc committee that would include representatives from all the different Care Council committees to review issues related to the handling of referrals that have been made by the Florida DOC. The first of the ad-hoc meetings will be held as a 3-hour meeting on 2/8/08 at a larger location. MAC will invite several speakers to the meeting including the representative from the Florida Department of Health that presented prison release data to the PCPG (Patient Care Planning Group). Reverend Abe Brown will also be invited. His organization has been helping ex-offenders reenter the community for 20 to 30 years. Others to be invited include a representative from the prison program in south Florida and Sharon West who works with HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS) in our area.

The normal MAC agenda will be suspended for the 2/9/08 MAC meeting.

**COMMUNITY  
CONCERNS AND  
ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Metro Charities has reserved space at the Hillsborough County Health Department on February 7<sup>th</sup> in honor of National Black HIV awareness day. Other providers are invited to come and

share information.

The Community Partnership is planning a community testing event on February 8<sup>th</sup> at the open air market also in honor of National Black HIV awareness day.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Minority Advocacy Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.