Florida's Information and Referral System: ReferNET

All of Florida's ADRCs/ARCs use a common information and referral (I&R) software application, ReferNET, which is a centralized internet accessible database that is comprised of two sections. It has a resource database that is also available to the public and a private, confidential client information database. ReferNET is specifically designed for I&R networks with multiple member organizations. Each area creates and maintains its own local resource data file in the central system, making these resources accessible to other I&R network members and to the public. When resource information is added or approved, changes are made by one Helpline and the data is available without delay to all 11 Helplines in the Florida network and online to the public. Individual Elder Helplines have the ability to use the system for recording and tracking individual call information and using that information to make referrals and schedule follow-ups.

Each Planning and Service Area (PSA) website has a link to the ReferNET resource database along with a copy of the inclusion/exclusion policy for resources. ReferNET includes contact information about each agency/organization, its location(s), and the services that are provided. The online database enables the public to see details such as the unique services, service hours and eligibility requirements for each service/site.

An ongoing statewide workgroup, composed of ADRC/ARC representatives, has standardized ReferNET for all users through uniform assignment of taxonomy codes and data collection field formats. Current resources in ReferNET are reviewed for accuracy and updated at least annually. New resources have been added by three ADRCs that serve adults with mental illness and resources are being added in the ADRC Expansion Grant pilot areas with an emphasis on agencies that specialize in serving adults with developmental disabilities. As ARCs transition to ADRCs, they may add resources that focus on other disabilities. On a statewide basis, efforts continue to add and update private-pay, non-profit and governmental resources as part of the database development.

In each Planning and Service Area (PSA), client/contact data is entered into ReferNET. All areas can see a caller/client's basic demographic information so that they are aware when a person is being served by another area. The full confidential caller/client record containing referrals, notes and statistical data is stored separately and can only be accessed by the ADRC/ARC that created the record. Access to client records can be granted to another PSA, or if the person relocates, the record can be transferred to the appropriate ADRC/ARC. Each PSA can tailor the contact module to fit its own needs and to develop data forms to gather needed information on contact persons or persons in need. It has a follow-up function that can be used to schedule follow-up calls and to send work to other ReferNet users. However, each PSA decides who has access to ReferNET and how ReferNET is used to communicate. Access may be granted to staff that perform other ADRC functions, lead agencies, providers and/or access points. Since ReferNET can be used by ADRC/ARC staff and not just by Helpline staff, it is possible for the ADRC/ARC to use it to follow a case through the process and record the needs, options discussed and information or services provided for each ADRC client.

In disasters ReferNET has a transfer function that allows a PSA to transfer its Contact Module of call/client data to another PSA. With one push of a button, a PSA who is experiencing a disaster can enable another PSA to record call data in their Contact Module section of the statewide database. When the disaster is over and the Helpline returns to work, the staff has records of all of the work done and can run reports and follow-up on clients in their area.

DOEA has enhanced its information systems support for the ADRCs/ARCs by interfacing the ReferNET I&R system with the Department's client data warehouse, CIRTS (Client Information and Registration Tracking System) allowing ADRC/ARC staff to more efficiently work between the two systems. CIRTS is used by the ADRCs/ARCs and its partners to manage client assessment data, register clients for services, plan client services and maintain program waiting lists. Referrals for services are indicated in the ReferNET I&R system and, through the interface, automatically communicated to CIRTS, reducing data entry delays and errors and allowing for client intake to be completed in CIRTS.