



# I Need Help. Where Do I Go?

NOTE: In addition to the person needing supports, “you” also refers to the family member or friend who will assist him or her to get the needed supports and services.

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## Where Do I Begin?

- If you are not registered with the County Office of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (MH/MR), you need to call the office and make an appointment to register for supports and services.
- Take documents to the appointment that will help establish that you are eligible for services through the mental retardation system. Some examples are medical, psychological and school records. The County MH/MR office will then determine if you are eligible.
- If you are found eligible to receive services and are requesting services now or in the future, you will receive supports coordination. You should have a choice of available Supports Coordinators and be able to meet with them before making a choice. If you do not make a choice, the county will identify a Supports Coordinator for you.

# What Happens Next?

Your Supports Coordinator will:

- Talk with you about what kinds of supports and services would be helpful to you.
- Offer you an opportunity to complete an application for the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver Program.

If sufficient funding and capacity for services is available, your Supports Coordinator will:

- Enroll you in services which will require completing additional applications.
- Help you develop your individual plan.
- Help you talk with individuals or agencies in the community that could support you.
- Coordinate and monitor supports and services.

If sufficient funding and capacity for services is not available, your Supports Coordinator will:

- Offer you the opportunity to complete a Prioritization of Urgency of Need for Services (PUNS) form and place you on the waiting list.
- Help to identify other types of community supports and services that would help you while you are waiting.

## Why Should I Complete the PUNS Form?

- Completing the PUNS form helps the county and the state to know the number of people who are waiting for supports and services, what kinds of services they need and the urgency of their need.
- Your county uses this information to develop its county plan and its annual budget request to the state Office of Mental Retardation. Keep in mind that county planning is done two years in advance of the current year.
- This information will be entered into the state's central Home and Community Based Information System. There are safeguards to ensure security and confidentiality and only certain people will have access to your personal information.

## How Do I Prepare for the PUNS Process?

- You should ask for a blank copy of the PUNS form before you meet with your Supports Coordinator, so you can read the form and decide what supports and services you need. You can get a copy of the PUNS form and a manual that explains how to complete it from your Supports Coordinator at the County Office of Mental Retardation.
- If you have access to a computer, you can download the PUNS form from the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Mental Retardation, Web site. Here are the steps to follow:
  - Go to the Web site: [www.dpw.state.pa.us](http://www.dpw.state.pa.us).  
(Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Home Page)
  - On the left side of the screen, click on "General Information."

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- Click on “Forms & Publications”
- On the next screen, scroll down to “Office of Mental Retardation Services Publications” and click on “Prioritization of Urgency of Nedd for Services (PUNS) ”
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- To open the PUNS form, you will need Acrobat Reader. This is a free software tool that makes it possible to open and download some documents. If you already have Acrobat Reader on your computer, it will load automatically. If you do not have Acrobat Reader, there will be a place where you will click to download it for free.
  
- When you meet with your Supports Coordinator, you can fill in your copy of the PUNS form while your Supports Coordinator completes a copy. This will give you a record of what is on your PUNS form, until your Supports Coordinator sends you a copy of the PUNS form that he or she completed and you signed.
  
- It is best to complete the PUNS form in a face-to-face meeting with your Supports Coordinator, so you can make sure that it is filled out appropriately to reflect your need. The PUNS should never be completed without your participation in the process.
  
- If necessary, you can request to complete the PUNS form by telephone. Even when it is done by telephone, you should still be given a copy of the PUNS form to sign.
  
- You should ask your Supports Coordinator to send you a copy of the signed PUNS form within one week of your in person or telephone meeting.

- Once a PUNS form is completed and it is on file, your Supports Coordinator should review it every year with you to see if there are any changes in your life. If there are no changes, then the original PUNS form stays as is.
- If your Supports Coordinator doesn't discuss and review your PUNS form every year, then you need to ask to have it done. This is your responsibility.

## **How Is the PUNS Form Completed?**

- Together, you and your Supports Coordinator will read and check off what pertains to you.
- First, you will be asked for general information such as your name and where you live. One of the questions you will be asked is, "Date Person Went on Waiting List." This date is when you first requested supports from the county and notified your Supports Coordinator of your need. Probably, this will be an earlier date than the one used in "Date Form Completed."
- You will be asked questions about your life that will help to determine the category of need where you belong. You will then be placed on the Waiting List for services, in the appropriate category.

Emergency Need means you need support immediately. An example of this is when there is a death in your family and there is no other family member available to provide support. People in the Emergency category receive supports and services before people in the other categories.

Critical Need means you need support within one year. However, if there are many people on the Emergency and

Critical Need lists, then it will probably take longer than a year before you receive funding. If you have an aging or ill caregiver, who will soon be unable to continue providing support, you belong in this category. Another example is when there has been a death or some other crisis in your family that reduces the capacity of the person who supports you. In addition, if you require services so your sole caregiver can work, then you belong in this category.

Planning for Need means that your need for supports or services is more than a year away but within the next five years, or if your primary caregiver is age 60 or older. Examples of this are when you tell your Supports Coordinator that you would like to move to another place or you need increased supports. If you are living in a large setting and need supports in the community, you also would fit into this category.

- Next there is a section called “Services and Supports.” Here you need to list the current supports you are receiving and also those that you will need in the future. You are not limited to the listed supports. You can add other things. In addition to the supports that you receive now that are funded and paid for by the mental retardation system, you also need to include supports that are not funded by the system. These could be things in your community that you pay for yourself or with private insurance.

## **What Do I Need to Do When My Needs Change?**

- You are responsible for notifying your Supports Coordinator when there are changes in your life.

- Your Supports Coordinator will then complete a new PUNS form with you. Your Supports Coordinator will use the information from the form to update your personal information in the county/state computer system.
- A new PUNS form can be done at any time during the year, since the county and state need to have this information as soon as possible for budget purposes.

## **If I'm Having Problems, Whom Do I Contact?**

- After a while, if you find the relationship between you and your Supports Coordinator isn't working, you should be able to choose another Supports Coordinator. In order to do this, you will need to talk with the Supports Coordination Supervisor at your County Office of Mental Retardation.
- When you are having other problems, first you need to contact your Supports Coordinator. If that doesn't work, then you contact the Supports Coordination Supervisor at your County Office of Mental Retardation.
- If your problem is not resolved, contact the County MH/MR Administrator.
- If your problem still is not resolved, contact the Regional Program Manager of the Office of Mental Retardation. The phone numbers are as follows:

Northeast Regional Office, 570-963-4391

Southeast Regional Office, 215-560-2247

Central Regional Office, 717-772-6507

Western Regional Office, 412-565-5144

- If you still need assistance after going through the county and regional offices, contact the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Mental Retardation.

The telephone number is 717-787-3700.

The Toll Free telephone number is 1-888-565-9435.

The Web site is [www.dpw.state.pa.us](http://www.dpw.state.pa.us).

- To resolve disputes, it is your right to use fair hearing and due process available through the Department of Public Welfare Hearings and Appeals. You can get forms to make an appeal from your Supports Coordinator.

This informational pamphlet was created by a work group of the Pennsylvania Self Determination Consumer and Family Group and the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Retardation.

For more information call The Partnership at 1-866-865-6170.

