

1. What is the Block Grant Program?

Pennsylvania's Human Services Block Grant program was created by Act 80 of 2012, which limited participation to 20 counties. In FY 2013-14, Act 55 of 2013 expanded the program to 30 counties. The act requires that participating counties submit a consolidated county human services plan. The participating counties have the flexibility to allocate their Human Services funding according to their specific needs, which may differ from one county to the next. County Human Services programs included in the Block Grant are mental health services, intellectual disabilities services, homeless assistance services, children and youth special grants, drug and alcohol services, and the Human Services Development Fund. None of these services can be eliminated in the Block Grant Program, but funding for one area may be reduced to increase resources in another. This is especially important because, as noted above, Lackawanna County's Human Services needs are likely to be very different from those of Philadelphia or a less densely populated, more rural county.

2. Why does the county need a Human Services Advisory Board?

The boards are designed to assure that there is community input into the Human Services planning process.

3. Will the Human Services Advisory Board continue if the Block Grant pilot program ends?

While the Block Grant affords the greatest flexibility for Human Services funding, it is not the sole funding stream for Human Services. The Human Services Advisory Board will provide input, advice and analysis regarding all Human Services' revenues and expenditures. That said, the Block Grant program was created by legislative act and thus would need to be amended or repealed via the legislative process. It is reasonable to assume that it will be in place for some time, since it phases in over five years, although counties may request a waiver from this provision. In each of those years, the percentage of the total participating county appropriation that may be reallocated increases. Lackawanna County's first year of participation was FY 2013-14, in which 25% could be reallocated. The percentage increases to 50% in 2014-15, to 75% in 2015-16, and to 100% in 2016-17. It is also reasonable to assume that the Human Services Advisory Board will remain active at least as long as the Block Grant program is in place.

4. What other counties have Human Services Advisory Boards?

Any county that participates in the Block Grant pilot program is required to have a planning group, though not all have chosen to have a Human Services Advisory Board with a scope that covers all funding and programming of Human Services.

5. What is the board's primary responsibility? Does it have any other assignments?

The board will be responsible for assisting in the hearing process through questioning and reviewing testimony and data analysis (with access to county resources and staff) to make recommendations to the Commissioners regarding funding and programming of all Human Services provided directly and indirectly by the County.

6. How often will the board meet? How will the public find out what happens at the meetings?

The board will meet quarterly. Meetings will be documented, and meeting notes will be available on the Lackawanna County website. Board members may also volunteer to attend or chair work groups and committees that the board authorizes.

7. How will the board obtain input from the community?

Community input is critical to the planning process. This will be achieved through public hearings presided over by the Lackawanna County Commissioners (either directly or through the Department of Human Services Director) and the Human Services Advisory Board.

8. When will the public hearings take place? How will the public find out about them?

Notice of the hearings will be posted on the county website and advertised in the news media. It is expected that the first public hearing will be held in late summer.

9. Who can testify at the hearings? Will the testimony be available to the public after the hearings?

Any member of the community—whether a consumer or provider of services—may testify. Details on how to register to testify at the public hearings will be posted on the county website and advertised in the news media.

10. What type of information will the board use in the plan to recommend how Human Services funds are allocated?

In addition to public testimony, the board will be considering a wide range of data on individual Human Services programs.

11. When will the Human Services plan be complete? Will it be made public?

The plan must be completed by the last Friday of November (in 2014 it will be the last Wednesday given the Thanksgiving Holiday). Once finalized, it will be posted on the county website.

12. How is the plan approved and/or adopted after its completion?

The draft plan will be reviewed by the Commissioners. Once their approval is obtained, the sections specifically pertaining to the Human Services Block Grant will be sent to the PA Department of Public Welfare for review and approval. Other

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sections may be included in the other categoricals' budget plans (e.g. Behavioral Health/Intellectual Disabilities/ Early Intervention, Office of Youth and Family Services, Aging, etc.) and submitted to their state oversight agencies.

13. How is "provider" defined?

A provider is defined as any agency that provides either an administrative function or a direct service.