

From: [Kevin De Liban](#)
Subject: ARChoices Update--Optum Assessments and More
Date: Wednesday, October 23, 2019 3:53:39 PM

Hi all. I know I haven't written for several months, but here's the latest updates on ARChoices and the controversial ARIA assessment tool.

(1) People on the program want a voice and are forming a group. As a result of the issues with RUGs and now the Optum assessment, people on the program, as well as their family and friends and concerned citizens, want to form a group so that they can have a voice in decisions about ARChoices that will affect them. The idea is still in the very early stages, but anyone interested in potentially being part of a group can write Bradley Ledgerwood at bradleyledgerwood@yahoo.com or call him at (870) 974-2256.

(2) Termination cases keep coming in. Over 85 people have called Legal Aid alone in the last nine months, most facing termination of ARChoices services. On these cases, we have largely been successful in getting people new assessments that then qualify them for services (but, we haven't won all the cases). We follow up throughout the care-planning process to make sure everything goes smoothly.

(3) Please let people know they can appeal reductions in hours and that we help with those. Although we have had some clients come to us facing reduced hours, we suspect that many more people are ending up without enough hours to meet their care needs. They may not be appealing reductions or they may not know help is available. And, new people on the program for the first time may not know that they can appeal to get more hours if DHS does not give them enough (either because of the budget level or Task and Hour Standards).

*******Please feel free to let people know they can call our Helpline at (800) 967-9224 for assistance with terminations and hour issues. We do not have enough attorneys to accept every case, but we're doing our best to help as many folks as we reasonably can.***

(4) SAVE THE DATE! Legal Aid will conduct trainings on the assessment and related algorithms on December 4 in northwest Arkansas and January 24 in Jonesboro. The event is set for 12/4/19 at 1 p.m. at the Jones Center (922 E Emma Ave, Springdale, AR 72764, USA) and 1/24/20 at 1 p.m. at the East Arkansas Area Agency on Aging (2005 E Highland Dr., Jonesboro, AR 72401). Like the last round of trainings we did in 2017, we'll try to make these fully accessible so that people who can't attend in person can either attend via Webinar or Facebook Live. Everyone is welcome to attend--people on the program, friends/family/neighbors, care aides, case managers, nurses, executives, and concerned citizens. ***More details to come.***

(5) The legislature is watching the Optum situation, but we don't know what will happen. On 7/9/19 and 8/20/19 and 10/15/19, different committees of the legislature discussed the ongoing problems with the assessment tool and Optum. The committee to watch seems to be the Arkansas Legislative Council's Review Committee. For the 10/15 meeting, DHS produced basic reports for the legislature, but these reports don't really seem to say anything meaningful about the quality of the assessments. The next meeting of the Arkansas Legislative Council's Review Committee is on 11/12/19. I do not know if ARChoices will be on the agenda. I also don't know if there's any serious chance of the legislature forcing DHS to stop using Optum.

(6) The ARIA assessment tool is not validated and is causing massive problems in Minnesota. The [Minneapolis Star Tribune](#) has just published a story looking at all the problems caused by the MnChoices assessment tool, which is the same thing DHS uses in Arkansas under a different name. It's a horrifying story of lost benefits and desperate families, hopeful only in that it mentions some of the ways people are fighting back. Most notably, the assessment tool isn't validated, which means the outcome can change based on who is punching the information into the computer or other factors that have nothing to do with a person's actual care needs.

(7) DHS is not keeping key data. Once again, DHS is not consistently tracking any data on the important issues: how many people have been cut off after so-called Quality Reviews, how many people are getting placed into which budget category, how many people are receiving increases/decreases in hours (and what kinds of things are causing the increases/decreases), how big are any increases/decreases, how many people are having their budget levels "grandfathered" in, and so on.

As always, please feel free to reach out with any questions, ideas, or comments.

Best,

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