

## Unbefriended Elders

**“Unbefriended Elders: Matching Values with Decisions”** (UEMVD) was a 28-month pilot project of VOA MN’s Care Management and Protective Services programs to assist older adults who have no designated decision maker to complete Health Care Directives (HCD).

“Unbefriended elders” have no close family or friends and thus may be subjected to over- or under- treatment if they are not able to provide medical providers with guidance about their wishes for treatment and care. Additionally, they are at risk of court intervention to appoint a guardian to make medical decisions for them, a costly and time-consuming process.

A Health Care Directive, which names a surrogate decision maker and/or documents preferences for medical treatment, can reduce or eliminate these risks. Over the course of the UEMVD project, more than 60% of the clients served completed medical instructions and a majority of them also appointed a health care agent. Over 830 social service and medical professionals were educated about the risks for unbefriended elders and the importance of obtaining HCDs for these individuals.

The UEMVD project heightened awareness of the need for all social service and medical professionals to contemplate advance directives for ALL clients before an actual medical crisis occurs. This is especially important for those at risk of cognitive incapacity who have no known family or close friends who could assist with medical decision making.

The UEMVD project was funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and Stevens Square Foundation, and was featured on TPT’s “Long Term Care Essentials” as part of their Honoring Choices Project. Although funding for the formal UEMVD project has ended, staff continue to be available for telephone consultation to assist families and professionals with completing HCDs, planning for incapacity, guardianship/conservatorship, working with persons impacted by dementia, and much more. With more than 50 years of combined experience Anita Raymond and Joyce Konczyk are skilled in working with clients who, because of cognitive impairments, may lack insight into their own needs and present unique challenges to their families and other professionals.

Contact Anita Raymond at 952-945-4172 or [araymond@voamn.org](mailto:araymond@voamn.org) for additional information about this project.