

## **National Background Check Program State of Puerto Rico**

### *Program Abstract*

The Puerto Rico Department of Health (DOH) proposes to establish and oversee a comprehensive program mandating that robust background checks be conducted on all prospective and existing direct patient/resident access employees of long term care (LTC) facilities and providers, as consistent with Federal and Commonwealth laws and regulations. DOH will provide a centralized electronic system to collect and coordinate information that both identifies disqualifying information and ensures its proper use. The program's overall goal is to protect the health and safety of individuals who receive long term care in facilities and from providers within their community. As CMS has identified and the experiences of states have demonstrated, comprehensive background check systems are important to ensuring a safer environment for recipients of long term care by preventing abuse, neglect and misappropriation of property. Major goals of the program will be 1) to protect the vulnerable patients and residents who reside in long term care facilities or receive long term care from providers and 2) identify crimes or convictions that disqualify a prospective employee while 3) avoiding the creation of barriers to job applicants that would significantly reduce the available workforce. The new program will replace current common practice in Puerto Rico, in which a prospective employee requests a certificate of good conduct attesting to lack of a criminal record from local police offices in order for prospective employers to make employment decisions.

This grant will enable the Puerto Rico Department of Health to thoroughly review the current process and assess the needed enhancements to implement a modern, all-inclusive and efficient background check system that will access all available sources to verify applicants' eligibility to work in LTC. Based on this assessment, DOH staff and consultants will design a new background check system that takes advantage of technological solutions to information access and processing and builds in timely feedback and appeals options. The three-year grant period provides enough time to develop the system, fully test and review the processes to make sure the final system is working as designed to deliver timely, fair and complete information to applicants and providers that ensures a protected long term health care workforce and patient population.

Total budget for the project period is \$3,933,147. Total Federal funds requested are \$2,969,613; remaining program funds will come from Puerto Rico local fund sources. Grant funds will be used to pay staff to (1) conduct background checks, (2) design and maintain the system and train others in its use, (3) upgrade fingerprinting, communications and IT equipment to meet the needs of the new program and (4) ensure collaboration across agencies within Puerto Rico and smooth interfaces with related registries and systems locally, regionally and nationally. The use of grant resources will make it possible for the agencies with responsibility for the health and safety of Puerto Rico's residents to leapfrog past intermediate stages of development to design and implement a state-of-the-art background check system.