

# Building Personal Supports Budgets for Adults with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

## Information Brief

### *Supports Intensity Scale and Assessment Levels*

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A personal “*supports budget*” is an individually based, prospectively-determined amount of funds that is made available to a person to provide services. The amount is determined given an objective assessment of the extent of an individual’s support needs, as well as the person’s type of residence (e.g., community residence, with family) and age (e.g., up to 22 years old, and older than 22 years). In the event of extraordinary personal needs, an “exceptions review process” is also used to assure that such needs are appropriately addressed.

When applied, the individual (and his or her guardian) is made aware of this budget in advance of a service planning meeting and may exercise some amount of discretion over how the allocated funds are used to acquire preferred services. The amount of discretion afforded the individual depends on the person’s type of residence and/or policy decisions made by policy makers.

An important part to this effort involves an assessment of support needs using the Supports Intensity Scale® (SIS). (Go to: [aaid.org/sis](http://aaid.org/sis))

Of course, this assessment cannot pinpoint every specific support a person needs day-to-day. These specifics are best determined during planning meetings to set individual person-centered plans. In other words, the SIS assessment should not direct the makeup of a plan, but the information it provides may be used to inform the plan. In addition, the SIS information will help policy makers understand the amount of support a person needs in relation to other people receiving services.

Based on the SIS assessment and responses to supplemental questions (if needed), each person receiving services is assigned to one of seven support levels, generally from least to most support. A person’s level assignment, in turn, allows policy makers to estimate the average type and amount of services a person might use, depending on his or her age and place of residence. This approach helps individuals to get the services they need to live in the community. It may also help policy makers to allocate resources fairly and serve as many as possible.

There are many parts to this process that must be developed to make supports budgets work the way they are intended. The purpose of this *Information Brief* is to describe the SIS and how it is used to form the seven assessment levels, and assign individuals to a level. What follows are responses to commonly asked questions about the SIS and the seven levels.

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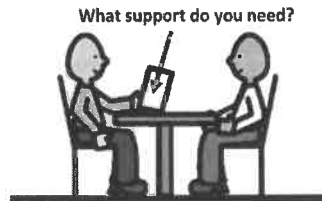


## What is the Supports Intensity Scale?

There are two versions of the SIS. The “SIS-Child” (SIS-C) is for children aged 5 to 15 years. The “SIS-Adult” (SIS-A) is for individuals aged 16 and above. The seven level assessment framework that has been developed pertains to individuals assessed using the SIS-A.

The SIS-A was created by researchers working with the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD). It

has been in use since 2004 and is a reliable and accurate tool for measuring the supports needs of individuals with I/DD. There are three sections.



**Section 1 Exceptional Medical and Behavioral Needs:** This section documents extra support needed to deal with particular medical and behavioral conditions, above and beyond the regular daily supports covered in Section 1. Two sub-sections address these domains:

- Part A: Medical Supports Needed
- Part B: Behavioral Supports Needed

**Section 2 Support Needs Index:** This section documents the general support needs of individuals, in terms of how often the support is needed, how long it takes to provide the support each time, and what type of assistance is needed. Six sub-sections address the major areas in which support is typically needed:

- Part A: Home Living Activities
- Part B: Community Living Activities
- Part C: Lifelong Learning Activities
- Part D: Employment Activities
- Part E: Health and Safety Activities
- Part F: Social Activities

**Section 3 Supplemental Protection and Advocacy Scale:** This section examines the types of activities the individual performs to protect and advocate for him or herself. Each activity is rated in terms of frequency, time, and type of support.



## What is the “seven level” assessment framework?

Assessment results are used to assign individuals to one of seven levels, labeled 1 through 7, related to their support needs. These levels are not associated with AAIDD or the SIS developers. Level 1 represents those with the least support needs while Levels 6 and 7 represent individuals with the highest need for support.

- Level 1:** Adults in this level have some but largely little for support, including little to no support need for medical and behavioral challenges. They can manage many aspects of their lives independently or with little assistance.
- Level 2:** Adults in this level have modest or moderate support needs and little to no support need for medical and behavioral challenges. They need more support than those in Level 1, but may have minimal needs in some life areas.
- Level 3:** Adults in this level have little to moderate support needs as in Levels 1 and 2. They also have an increased, but not significant, support need due to behavioral challenges.
- Level 4:** Adults in this level have moderate to high need for support. They may have behavioral support needs that are not significant but range from none to above average.
- Level 5:** Adults in this level have high to maximum support needs. They may have behavioral support needs that are not significant but range from none to above average.
- Level 6:** Adults in this level have significant need for medical support but also may have similar support needs to individuals in Level 5. Individuals in this level may have some need for support due to behavior that is not significant.
- Level 7:** Adults here have significant behavioral challenges, regardless of their support need to complete daily activities or for medical conditions. These adults typically need significantly enhanced supports due to behavior.

The graphic below illustrates these levels. Levels 1, 2, 4 and 5 include individuals from less to more need, but Levels 3, 6 and 7 include individuals with modest behavioral challenges (3), complex medical needs (6) and extraordinary behavioral challenges (7).



**Are other factors considered when assigning a person to a level?**

Yes. During the SIS assessment, a short series of additional questions, called **Supplemental Questions**, are asked. Particular responses pertaining to medical and behavioral needs indicate to a SIS assessor that further review of support needs in those areas is warranted. These questions focus on information particular to either medical and/or behavioral support needs.

Responses to the supplemental questions may require “verification”, which involves a review of an individual’s record. After the review, the individual may be assigned to Level 6 (medical) or Level 7 (behavioral) to best meet their needs.



**What criteria are used to define each assessment level?**

The SIS allows for scale scores to be calculated related to various sections. To assign individuals to an assessment level the following information is used:

- The sum of the standard, not “raw” scale scores in Parts A, B, and E in Section 2. These include scales on Home Living, Community Living, and Health and Safety Activities. This score may range from 8-52 with lower scores reflecting less overall need for support.

- Scale scores associated with Section 1, Part A on Medical Needs (scored 0-38\*) and Part B on Behavioral Needs (scored 0-26). Again, lower scores indicate less overall need.
- Responses to Supplemental Questions. A response of “2” to any item in Parts 1A or 1B in addition to meeting specific criteria indicating exceptional medical or behavioral need. Case review of such information can be used to assign an individual to Level 6 or 7.

The table below shows the seven levels and the criteria used to assign individuals to a level.

Support Levels	Support Need (Sum of Parts A, B,E)	Medical Support (Section 1A)	Behavior Support (Section 1B)
1 Least Support Needs	8 to 22	0 to 6	0 to 6
2 Moderate Support Needs	23 to 30	0 to 6	0 to 6
3 Mild to Moderate Support Needs with Some Behavioral Needs	0 to 30	0 to 6	7 to 10
4 Moderate Support Needs with Mild to Moderate Behavioral Needs	31 to 36	0 to 6	0 to 10
5 High Support Needs and Mild to Moderate Behavioral Needs	37 to 52	0 to 6	0 to 10
6 Extraordinary Medical Support Needs	Any	7 to 32 or Extraordinary medical risk*	0 to 10
7 Extraordinary Behavioral Support Needs	Any	Any	11 or 26 or Danger to others or Extreme self-injury risk*

\* We recognize that the scoring range in the SIS-A for Section 1, Part A Medical Needs is 0-38. In the original SIS (used from 2004-2015), this medical scale included three fewer items and ranged from 0-32. To assure consistency in the decision criteria across the two SIS versions, HSRI adjusted scoring in the SIS-A medical scale. This was done by grouping together the three new items and accounting for them within an item reserved for “other” medical conditions. As a result, for purposes of level assignment the scoring range for the SIS-A medical scale is 0-32.