

MEMORANDUM

TO: Developmental Services Stakeholders

FROM: Jessica Bernard, Deputy Director of Payment Reform, DAIL

DATE: August 5, 2022

RE: SIS-A Assessment Cycle

The initial sample phase of the Supports Intensity Scale-Adults (SIS-A) assessments, is anticipated to finish in the summer of 2022. The intent of the sample, as outlined in a [communication](#) from July 6, 2021, is to gather information about support needs of Vermonters across the state to help design a new and improved way of paying agencies for the services that are provided to individuals. Once the sample group is complete, the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) and contractor Burns and Associates will begin the process of analyzing that sample to see how the results might be used to create a future payment model. The analysis is expected to start in the fall of 2022 and continue through the spring of 2023.

As the analysis of the sample and drafting of a potential payment model moves forward, we will also begin completing regular SIS-A assessments for individuals receiving Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) starting September 1, 2022. This timing is important to comply with federal Conflict of Interest rules that requires everyone receiving HCBS supports to have a SIS-A assessment completed by the end of calendar year 2025. As first discussed in a [communication](#) during the roll out of the tool, SIS-A assessments will be completed once every three years, or as needed if an individual has a major change in support need that necessitates a reassessment.

The Department has discussed and agreed with stakeholders (Provider Agencies, SPSC, DAB, and three different Payment Reform Advisory committees) that DAIL will create a three year schedule for a individuals to complete their SIS-A assessment. Agencies will work with individuals and families/guardians to ensure that the timing of their assessment will work for them. The schedule will outline the year and month for the assessment to take place, not the specific date and time. If the scheduled timeframe does not work for the individual or family/guardian, they may choose a different timeframe that is convenient for them. This process will allow for a person-centered approach in identifying when people feel ready to complete the assessment. This will also allow agencies to assess the capacity of their staff and determine who has the ability to help support individuals and families/guardians through the assessment process. Once timeframes have been agreed upon, the agency will send a referral to Public Consulting Group (PCG) to schedule the specific date and time of the assessment.

DAIL has heard from stakeholders that one of the major concerns they have is that DAIL is not yet able to say how SIS-A assessment results will inform individual budgets and services. The department is confident that the upcoming analysis and payment modeling work will provide stakeholders with the information needed to address those concerns. DAIL is also committed to drafting more than one payment model for consideration, including one that ties to the SIS-A score to a service budget and one that does not. The goal of offering different payment model proposals is to reassure people that the process is not predetermined, and we will be seeking input before making any final decisions.

It is also important to know that the implementation of the SIS-A three-year assessment cycle this September is intended to give everyone the time needed to prevent any added pressure on individuals, families/guardians, and agency staff to try to get a large number of people assessed in a short amount of time to comply with Conflict of Interest rules by 2025. Another benefit of starting the regular assessment process in September is that more people will be able to complete the SIS-A which will give a better estimate of how well the tool is measuring need so that when we are able to start stakeholder engagement sessions to discuss a future payment model, there will be more people who have experienced the assessment and have scores to inform opinions about if the assessment score is a good measure to potentially base a service budget on.

Another important reminder is that there will always be a process for people to ask for an exception if they believe the future budget framework does not meet their need, no matter what payment model is chosen. In the event that someone receives fewer services under a new payment method, they will continue to have grievance and appeal rights for services paid for by Medicaid.

Engagement sessions for individuals, families, and guardians are planned for September and October to help answer questions and hear concerns. Meeting information will be posted at: [DDS Payment Reform | Developmental Disabilities Services Division \(vermont.gov\)](#). DAIL will continue to offer engagement sessions each quarter on an ongoing basis so keep people informed about changes related to Payment Reform and to gather feedback and input.