

## Information About Changes in Assessing Support Needs in Developmental Disabilities Services

### What is happening?

The State is working to improve the way it measures people's support needs. Measuring need is an important first step in setting up the right Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) for a person. This process is called a "Needs Assessment." It usually involves answering a set of questions about the individual and how they go about their day-to-day life.

The State and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) require a Needs Assessment for people to start getting services. The State has used the same set of questions for many years to measure people's needs. The State will be using a new set of questions to measure people's needs starting in September 2022.

### What is changing?

Vermont will use a new tool for completing Needs Assessments. The tool is called the "**Supports Intensity Scale-Adult Version™**" or (**SIS-A™**). Many other states and countries use the SIS-A™ to measure the amount of support people need in their everyday lives. The SIS-A™ focuses on the strengths of people, not their challenges. The State chose the SIS-A™ because

---

it reflects that values of our System of Care. These values include the importance of having choice and control in one's life.

In addition, the State is changing who completes the Needs Assessment. The designated agencies have been doing people's Needs Assessments. The State has hired an independent company, [Public Consulting Group](#) (PCG), who completed 500 sample SIS-A™ assessments starting in July, 2021. PCG will keep doing the SIS-A™ assessments in all parts of the State.

Starting in September 2022, agencies will receive a list of the people they provide services for and a timeframe for when they might take the SIS-A™. If the timeframe doesn't work for the individual, family member, or guardian it can reschedule for a later date. It is completely up to the participants. Once a timeframe is agreed on, the agency will contact PCG to schedule the specific date and time for the assessment. The date and time will be something that works for everyone attending the assessment.

## **Why is the State Making these changes?**

Right now, Needs Assessments are done differently in different parts of the State. The State wants to use a "standardized" tool. "Standardized" means that the questions will get asked the same way no matter where it is used. For example, a person living in Bennington would get similar results from an interview using the SIS-A™ as a person with similar support needs who lives in Newport. Using a standardized tool ensures that services are provided in a fair and equitable way across the whole State. The SIS-A™ is a standardized tool.

The State is using a single company to conduct the SIS-A™ because this makes it easier to conduct the SIS-A™ interviews in a consistent way. The federal government, which provides much of the funding for services, is also telling states that Needs Assessments cannot be done by the same agency that provides services because it is a conflict of interest. To ensure a fair

process, Needs Assessment have to be a separate, independent activity and can't be done by the agency that provides services.

## When is this changing?

On July 1, 2021, Public Consulting Group started completing the SIS-A™ assessments for a sample group of 500 people who are already receiving services. This group of 500 sample assessments will **not impact a person's services**. The information from these assessments will be used to help the State decide how to use the SIS-A™ in creating funding for services in the future. This new method of using the SIS-A™ to develop the funding for services will not be in place until at least **2025**. In the meantime, agencies will continue to use the same Needs Assessment that they are using now to make decisions about services. Individuals who completed a sample SIS-A™ will take another assessment within the next three years.

Starting in September 2022, individuals will start taking the SIS-A™ assessment. These assessments are not part of the sample and **are going to help determine future services**. The state will be working to develop a potential payment model that uses a SIS-A™ score to create a possible budget and an alternative model that does not. If a payment model is chosen that uses a SIS-A™ score to create a budget, individuals and families/guardians will have the opportunity to ask for an exception if there is still an unmet need. Individuals and families/guardians will also continue to have the opportunity to appeal any loss of service. If a payment model is chosen that uses a SIS-A™ score, no changes would happen until 2025 and it is possible that the majority of people would not see a difference in their budget or services.

The assessment does not replace the Individual Support Agreement (ISA) process or determine an individual's goals or dreams. The assessment results will help the individual, family, guardian, and support team know which areas someone may need support around and which areas are strengths. The assessment can be used to help talk about the supports someone

wants but doesn't tell the individual/family what they have to focus on. Planning for supports and services is still up to the individual/family and support team.

## **What will happen when it's my turn to have a SIS-A™ interview?**

The Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) will create a monthly timeframe for everyone in HCBS services to take a SIS-A™ assessment once over the next three years. DDSD will suggest a month when people could take the assessment, but individuals, families, agency staff, and PCG will schedule the specific date and time together. DDSD will share the general timeframe with each agency. The agency will share the timeframe with individuals and families/guardians.

If an individual is scheduled for a general date that does not work, the individual/family can choose a different timeframe that does work for everyone. Once you have a timeframe that works, your case manager will contact Public Consulting Group (PCG) and they will contact the individual and/or family member or guardian to schedule the SIS-A™ assessment. PCG will find a time that works for the individual and those supporting the individual. These assessments are required by the State, so teams must work with PCG to schedule the assessment.

Here is what to expect at the Assessment:

- ⇒ A complete interview using the SIS-A™ takes about 2 hours.
- ⇒ It's OK to ask for breaks or to complete the assessment over more than one session.
- ⇒ At least two (2) other people who know the individual with a disability well should participate in the interview. The individual may want a family member, friend, and/or support provider to participate.
- ⇒ The interview can take place by videoconference or in-person, whatever the individual, family member, or guardian prefers.
- ⇒ If the individual uses augmentative or alternative communication, the individual will have their device and/or support provider during the interview.

⇒ The interview questions will be about different activities like dressing and going to the grocery store. The interviewer wants to learn about the support that the individual needs to do these activities successfully. There are also questions about the individual's mental health, health, and healthcare needs.

After the interview takes place, the Case Manager will receive a copy of the results. The Case Manager will share these results with the individual and the individual's family or guardian. Participants can also share their email contact information with PCG if they would like to receive the results directly.

## Where can I get more information?

More information about the SIS-A can be found here:

- [What is the SIS A](#)– video presentation with information about participating in an assessment.
- [What is the SIS A Report](#)- video presentation with information about how to read the report you get after the assessment
- [Sample SIS A](#)- an example of a SIS-A™ report that also shows all the questions that will be asked. *Note: this not based on a real person.*
- [SIS A Handbook](#)- what to expect during a SIS-A™ interview, how to read the SIS-A™ report and possible uses of SIS-A™ information.

Other information about the SIS-A™ is available on the AAIDD website:

- <https://www.aaid.org/sis>
- <https://www.aaid.org/sis/sis-a>

DAIL/DDSD website:

- <https://ddsd.vermont.gov/projects-initiatives/dds-payment-reform/dds-payment-reform-standardized-assess-workgroup>