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From the Assistant Commissioner, Developmental Services

My Life, My Community is a system-redesign initiative undertaken by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to improve services for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (I/DD). Recognizing that different people need different levels of support, our goal is to make sure that people get the right mix of services and supports to thrive in their communities and live as independently as possible.



As part of this initiative, DBHDS, with extensive stakeholder involvement, developed a framework to match services to an individual’s needs with rates that support the services. This system should anticipate future needs more effectively and provide people with greater choice, control, and engagement with their support systems. Using this framework, we will assign adults with I/DD to one of seven levels based on their assessed support needs. Then, given a level assignment, each individual will receive an individualized supports plan. This approach will allow people to customize the mix of services they receive based on their assessed needs, within certain limits. Notably, we are also developing ways to address the needs of people whose needs do not fit this approach.

To test how well the seven-level model works, DBHDS conducted a validation study. Specifically, we wanted answers to three questions:

1. How well can we match people to the right support needs level? In other words, does the seven-level approach work?
2. Do the people within a particular level have roughly the same type and amount of support needs?
3. Based on a person’s living arrangement or residence type and for each support level, how well did we do at anticipating the types and amount of services needed?

Overall, the results of the study show that the model we developed works very well. Here we present details on how the validation was conducted, the results, and what they mean.



What exactly did DBDHS want to study?

DBHDS uses the Supports Intensity Scale® (SIS)—and supplemental questions when needed—to assess the support needs of the individuals it serves. Based on the results of the assessment, we assign individuals to one of seven levels, labeled 1 through 7, related to their support needs.

Assessment results are used to assign individuals to one of seven levels.

DBHDS used all of the information gathered to imagine the types and amounts of services that individuals in each support level would need.

The result was a series of service packages with each designed to offer individuals a mix and amount of services related to their needs and residence.

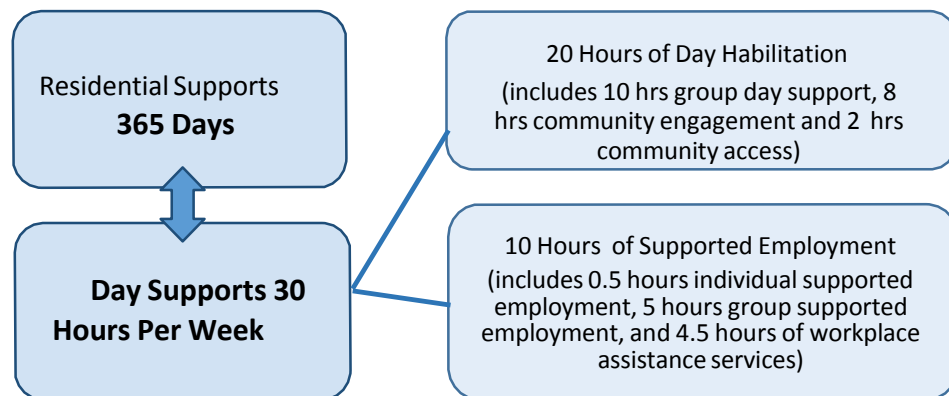
We wanted to know how well we did. And so, we conducted a validation study to find out.

Level 1 represents those with low support needs, while Levels 6 and 7 represent individuals who need the most extensive support. We then reviewed the types and amounts of services that people in each level used in the past.

Next, we used all of the information gathered to identify a representative service picture for each support level, imagining the types and amounts of services that people in each level would need based on their residence type (living alone, living with family, in a group home, in a sponsored residential setting, in supported living, and independent living). The proposed Building Independence Waiver service of “independent living supports” is new and is meant for people with relatively few support needs.

The result was a series of “service packages” relative to needs and type of residence. The illustration below shows what a typical package may look like. The case below shows individuals assigned to Level 4 (moderate to high support needs) who live in a group home.

Service Package for People Assigned to Level 4 Who Live in a Group Home



The package assumes a full year (365 days) of residential support and 30 hours a week of day supports. The day service mix is broken out in anticipation of the person using different day services. We understand that each person’s exact day service use may vary, but this approach allows DBHDS to establish a supports plan for each person.

Given the seven support levels and six residential options, we developed 42 different service packages. Each package was designed in a way similar to the one illustrated above, but the mix and amount of services in each package varied.

How was the validation study completed?



To test the accuracy of the supports level framework and service packages we established, we conducted a validation study. The study was completed in five steps:

1. A sample of 155 people was selected from those who already were assessed with the SIS and assigned a supports level. People were chosen from all seven levels and from various living situations.
2. Records were retrieved for each person. These records provided information on each person’s support needs and service use.

Validation refers to a process where we test the accuracy or legitimacy of something we've developed.

We wanted to see if others would affirm or approve of the supports level framework and services packages we established.

A Validation Team was asked to determine if:

- *Each individual reviewed matched the description of the assessment level to which he/she was assigned.*
- *The individuals in each level, as a group, tended to share similar support needs.*
- *Each individual reviewed would be appropriately supported by the service package to which he/she would be assigned.*

3. A Validation Team of 21 professionals was convened to review the records, each person's level assignment and the service packages. All of these professionals work with people with I/DD in some capacity.

4. After reviewing the available information, the Validation Team was asked to determine if:

- Each individual reviewed matched the description of the assessment level to which he/she was assigned.
- The individuals in each level, as a group, tended to share similar support needs.
- Each individual reviewed would be appropriately supported by the service package to which he/she would be assigned.

To reach their conclusions, the Team talked with one another and used specific criteria to make their determinations.

5. The results were analyzed by DBHDS and its consultants.



What were the results of the validation study?

What follows is a summary of what the Validation Team found for each of the three determinations it was asked to make.

Did each individual reviewed match the description of the assessment level to which he/she was assigned?

The validation team noted a match between the assessment levels that individuals were assigned and what the case records suggest for 82.9% of the sample. An additional 8.5% were assigned to a level that would have provided *more support* than required, so 91.4% of the individuals' levels would match or exceed their service needs.

These findings show a strong, acceptable relationship between assessment findings and evidence found within individual records.

Did individuals in each level, as a group, tend to share similar support needs?

The study team found that the members of each assessment level indeed shared a common level of support need.

Would each individual reviewed be appropriately supported by the service package to which he/she would be assigned?

The validation study shows that the service packages offered an appropriate amount of support for most people living in most settings. The Team determined that:

- 91.7% of the people living in supported living would be offered an appropriate service package.
- 84.4% of the people living with their families would be offered an appropriate service package.

The validation team noted a match between the assessment levels individuals were assigned and what the case records suggest for 82.9% of the sample.

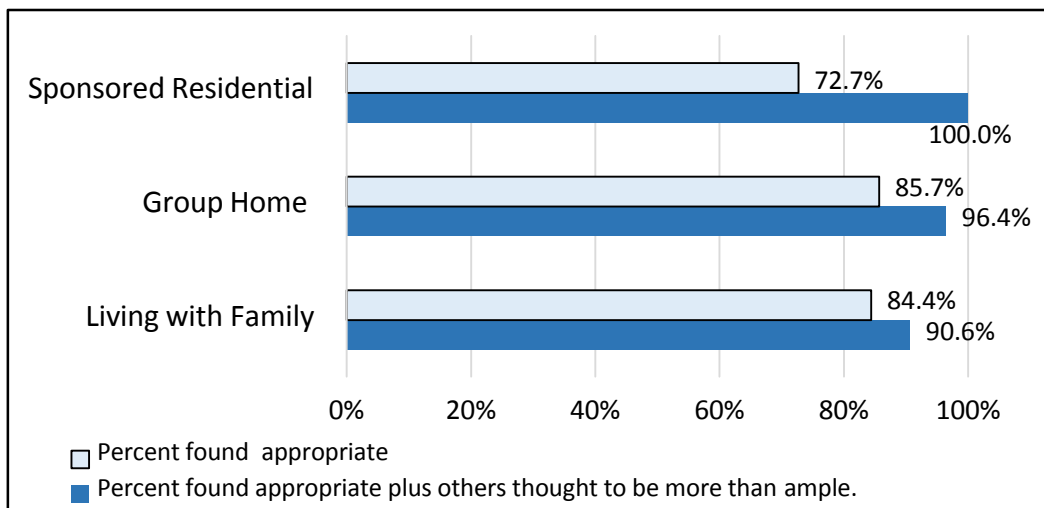
The study team found that the members of each assessment level shared a common level of support need.

The validation study shows that the service packages offered an appropriate amount of support for most individuals living in most settings.

- 85.7% of the people living in group homes would be offered an appropriate service package.
- 72.7% of the people living in sponsored residential settings would be offered an appropriate service package.

In fact, we looked more closely at circumstances involving people living with families, in group homes and sponsored residential. We discovered that the Team sometimes thought the service package was inappropriate in that it offered **more support than necessary** as opposed to too little. The figure below illustrates that when we take this into account, the service packages for these living options are well received.

Service Packages Found Appropriate by Three Residential Options



Two of the living options that were tested require special comment.

- The Living Alone residential option did not fare as well as the other options, but its performance by level is worth noting. The Team found that the service package for people living alone would do well for people in Level 1 (80%) and Level 4 (73%). The Team did not find that the packages associated with other levels would be appropriate.

Presently, less than 1% of service recipients are living alone. As a matter of policy, we may determine that individuals assigned to Levels 2-7 are best served in other living arrangements, and that the Living Alone option may be best reserved for relatively able people who require minimal or intermittent support. Still, if DBHDS decides otherwise, we understand that the packages associated with this option will need to be adjusted.

- DBHDS envisions the Independent Living residential option as one especially meant for individuals with the lowest levels of support need (i.e., Level 1). The individuals accessing this service package are likely to be living alone and would benefit from some personal care and habilitative services. In addition, they would likely be working competitive jobs in the community with little to no support.

As expected, the Team found that the service package here was appropriate for individuals assigned to Level 1 only.

DBHDS expects that with the systems changes we are planning that individuals with I/DD will have greater control over their services, and also get the supports they need to live in and be part of their communities.

What DBHDS plans next is to consider a few adjustments to the service packages based on what we learned and to seek further comment from the public.

After these steps are completed DBHDS will be almost ready to implement its supports budget models.



What happens next and where can I get more information?

DBHDS expects that, with the systems changes we are planning, people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities will have greater control over their services, but will also get the supports they need to live in and be part of their communities. To help achieve this objective, individuals will be allocated an individualized support plan that is based on their level of support needs and where they live.

For this approach to work, DBHDS must be able to anticipate the type and amount of services that people will use by level of need and by residence. To do so we developed a series of service packages to illustrate the services we imagined people would use. The results of this study show that support needs levels and their associated service packages generally met with the approval of the Validation Team.

Still, we recognize that no fixed model will work for all individuals. After all, some individuals, for any number of reasons, will require special accommodations. As a result, DBHDS already plans a vigorous exceptions review process for identifying and addressing the needs of such individuals.

Next DBHDS plans to consider a few adjustments to the service packages based on what we learned and to seek further comment from the public. After these steps are completed, DBHDS will be ready to implement its supports budget models.

For more information about DBHDS' *My Life, My Community* initiative, please check the agency website at: www.dbhds.virginia.gov/individuals-and-families/developmental-disabilities/my-life-my-community



Learn More

Visit the DBHDS website at www.dbhds.virginia.gov.

- Choose tabs titled “Individuals and Families” or “Professionals and Service Providers”
- In the drop down menu choose “Developmental Disability Services”
- The menu in the left side panel offers you many topics to choose from. Learn about:
 - My Life, My Community initiative
 - Person Centered Planning
 - The Supports Intensity Scale
 - And many other topics.