

Increase Efficiencies and Protect Home and Community Based Services

The Council is mindful of budget growth and Alaska's current fiscal constraints. Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) are the most cost efficient way to deliver critically required services to Alaskans with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). The Council also knows that Alaskans deserve innovative thinking and the exploration of more efficient ways to deliver services. Savings realized through cutting waste or eliminating inefficiencies should be invested in building capacity to provide the needed HCBS services to keep people healthy, safe, and engaged in meaningful lives.



The Council offers the following recommendations developed by stakeholders to enhance the I/DD service system and achieve cost savings without reducing funding for needed services.

1. Remove barriers posed by unnecessary regulation and redundant reporting

- Routine, repeated evaluations for adults on a waiver whose experience with disability is stable, and who are well-connected to supporters and services, are redundant and unnecessary; costing state staff resources as well as adding to the burden felt by individuals with disabilities and families. Screening and check-ins, instead of annual and triennial evaluations and reporting would appear to be more cost-effective and still satisfy the state's obligation to oversee its resources and to protect vulnerable adults.
 - ✓ By eliminating or reducing the number of repeat assessments and reviews of circumstances that don't change, the state could realize savings that could be better spent providing services that facilitate meaningful lives.
- In 2014, Alaska became an Employment First state. Regulations remain which present barriers to employment. Alaska regulation 7 AAC 130.231(a)(2) lists the waiver services available outside an individual's home community. Surprisingly, supported employment is not included. The result is that jobs requiring any travel out of the home community and rely on supported employment services are not available to waiver recipients. People who are already employed risk job loss, as well as having to turn down opportunities for advancement, if travel is required. People seeking employment have reduced opportunities unrelated to their ability to perform the essential functions of the work. Having more Alaskans with disabilities employed is positive for the state's economy.
 - ✓ A Task Force on Employment for Alaskans with Disabilities would allow for a more in-depth review of this area to achieve more efficiencies through barrier elimination.

2. Eliminate unnecessary costs and bureaucracy by allowing flexible purchasing for home medical supplies

Current process:

- People with home medical supply needs are restricted by outdated state procurement and purchasing processes.
- Reimbursement is only available if it conforms to an inflexible advance plan for purchasing with the state supervising approved suppliers, the amount of supplies purchased, the preferred brand, the period in which they must be purchased, etc.
- Families are restricted from buying items in the amounts or types they prefer and from using reliable low cost source options, unless they request additional approval from the state.
- Small changes in the lives of recipients can result in families scrambling to get approval for different quantities of basic supplies such as bed pads, gloves, ointment, or incontinence supplies (disposable undergarments).
- Families often must purchase from more expensive approved suppliers instead of having the flexibility to purchase supplies from low-cost outlets.
- The approval processes necessary for changes in type of product, brands or amounts adds stress to hard-working Alaskan families and is expensive for the state.
- The bureaucratic process also siphons attention and fiscal resources away from the important aim of providing resources for meaningful lives in the home and community.
 - ✓ The Council welcomes the opportunity to work with lawmakers and DHSS to develop creative alternatives that meet CMS requirements and meet families' needs for flexibility in purchasing.

3. Increase savings and self-determination by offering an option for people with I/DD to more closely direct their services

- Currently, people receiving Medicaid waiver services have a plan of care that describes goals and areas of support for needs defined by standardized assessments. The plan describes services to meet the need, such as day habilitation, respite, supported living, supported employment services, etc.; services which have a total cost associated with them, a known amount of dollars that is divided up into types of services.
- Other states have found another option to offer, self-directed services through “budget authority” where the existing service cost total in the plan can be used as a ceiling for spending.¹ With support from a financial advisor, people can select the services they want to purchase to facilitate a meaningful life of their choosing, as long as they stay below the cost ceiling. People could focus spending on supported employment or for volunteering in the community. Someone else may want increased independence in a home of their own and so would invest in services for supported living, rather than more time in the community. Flexibility, self-determination, reduction of wasteful purchases, and increased community engagement are some of the reported benefits of “budget authority”, and reflect Alaskan values of using resources conservatively, where they will do the most good.



Current Process for HCBS:

Separate buckets of funding for each service

New Option Idea:

The same funding allotted total through the current process, placed within one bucket directed by the individual receiving services with financial management support

4. Initiate Adult Companion Services

- For many adults with disabilities, having meaningful lives requires nonmedical supervision and socialization that can be provided in any community setting to avoid isolation and regression.
- When day habilitation hours were capped by DHSS in 2018, stakeholders shared that many people lost service hours that they used for building skills in their community. The 30th legislature instructed DHSS to amend the State's 1915(c) Home and Community Based Waivers to include companion services.² DHSS submitted a plan to the Senate Finance Committee on January 31, 2019 for moving forward to provide those services, and a draft concept paper was developed with key stakeholders.
- To date, the Council is not aware of any new developments regarding the draft concept paper or other actions proposed under the plan to initiate companion services, but continues to hear from stakeholders how vital and needed this service is for Alaskans with disabilities.
- Adult Companion Services facilitate independence, promote community inclusion, and prevent isolation. These services can also help someone maintain a habilitation goal contained in a support plan; perhaps avoiding the skill regression that can occur at home, and which can ultimately lead to higher service costs later.



The Council stands ready to work with the Trust, DHSS, and the Governor's office to come up with a plan to initiate the efficiency ideas of stakeholders listed above. These areas will help Alaska to fully realize the Developmental Disability Shared Vision of person-directed meaningful lives for Alaskans with developmental disabilities.

¹ "Self-direction/budget authority definition: <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/long-term-services-supports/self-directed-services/index.html>

² "It is the intent of the legislature to the State of Alaska proceed expeditiously to establish companion services under Section 1915(c) of the Social Security Act to complement and support the services provided through the Medicare/Medicaid waiver programs. The Department of Health and Social Services shall submit a report to co-chairs of the finance Committee and the Legislative Finance Division on the status of the service no later than January 31, 2019."