How Do I Choose a Provider for the Supports I Need?
How do I choose a provider of supports through the Intellectual Disability system?

Anyone who needs support through the ID system will eventually decide on a provider and/or model of support. This decision may be difficult. Designed to assist people who have chosen Home and Community-Based services, this booklet offers helpful steps for those who will choose a provider of services and supports.

To simplify, we used the term “you” throughout this booklet. The “you” refers to the person receiving services, though we recognize that it is often family members assisting with choosing a provider.

Where do I even start to figure out how my supports should be provided and who can provide them?

**STEP 1**  
*The place to start is with your vision of how you want to live your life.*

It is important to know what you want and need before you begin looking for the right type of service and the right provider for you. Knowing the answers to the questions below is an important first step.

What do I want my life to look like in 5 years? 10 years?

*Here are some questions to think about:*

- Where do you want to live?
- Who do you want to live with?
- Who are your friends?
- What is your relationship with your family and extended family?
- What activities do you like to do for fun?
• Do you have a job?
• How do you participate in your community?

Write down some ideas:

Some other things to think about:
• What is your personality? (Do you like to be around people or prefer to be alone?)
• What type of environment do you prefer? (Do you tolerate noise; do you like things messy or need everything in place? Are you active and like to be busy?)
• What is most important to you about the people or the agency that supports you?

Write down some ideas:

STEP 2  Get the facts about what is out there.

Supports Coordination

Everyone who is eligible for ID services will get a Supports Coordinator (SC). In some situations, you will get to choose the organization that provides your Supports Coordination.

• In some counties, when you enroll in ID services, you will be offered a choice of Supports Coordination Organizations (SCOs).
• Consolidated and Person/Family Directed Support (P/FDS) Waiver participants have a choice of willing and qualified SCOs - this includes the choice to cross county lines to get a Supports Coordination Organization.

In choosing a SCO, what kind of questions would you ask a Supports Coordination Organization (SCO)?

Here are some examples:
• How would you describe the philosophy and values of your agency?
• How long have you provided services and supports in this county and in other counties?
• How many people do you serve?
• May I talk to people who use your services?
• May I talk with some of your SCs?
• May I have a copy of your annual report?
• Are you connected to the local resources and community? Give examples.
• What is your policy about response time on calls and emails?
• What is the policy about changing SCs if I want a different SC?
• On average, how long do your SCs stay on the job?
• How knowledgeable are the SCs and what training do your SCs get in order to help me live the life I want?
• What is the agency’s management structure in my county, at particular sites (e.g. Is there an office nearby? Is the site managed from afar?)
• How long has the CEO been with this agency? Can you tell me about him/her and his/her background?
• How long have other management staff been with this agency?

Add your own specific questions:

DIFFERENT MODELS OF SERVICE AND SUPPORT

There are two very general models for services.

TRADITIONAL – You choose an existing agency to provide the supports you need.
• You use their staff.
• Agency is responsibility to provide services outlined in your Individual Support Plan (ISP) within the budget.

PARTICIPANT-DIRECTED – You create an individualized way to meet your needs, using Financial Management Services (FMS) or Microboard®.
• You recruit, hire and manage staff.
• You assume control of your budget.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT RESIDENTIAL OPTIONS?

There are several types of services to support someone where they live and in community activities.

When applying for services, one of your first choices about supports is choosing between an institutional setting versus a home and community-based setting. You make this choice by filling out the “Waiver Application and Service Delivery Preference” form (DP 457).

This booklet is designed to assist people who have chosen Home and Community-Based services in making decisions about their services and supports.

INSTITUTIONAL
• State Center (non-waiver Medicaid entitlement) – A large facility which is run directly under the Office of Developmental Programs. The state centers are: Ebensburg, Hamburg, Polk, Selinsgrove, and White Haven.

• Intermediate Care Facility for the Intellectually Disabled (ICF/ID) (non-waiver Medicaid entitlement) – A facility which can be operated by the State or privately and is licensed by the Department of Health. Most people who live in ICF/IDs live in large facilities serving 40-400 people, however there are also ICF/IDs that are homes of 4-8 people in the community.

COMMUNITY-BASED
• Community Home – A home in the community in which care and support services are provided to one or more individuals. Services in the home include assistance in the activities of daily living that support a person’s personal and intellectual development, physical and personal care, recreation and socialization in the community.

• Lifesharing – 1 or 2 people living with a family that is paid to include/support that person as a surrogate family member.

• Independent or Supported Living – Living with your family, a roommate or on your own with some paid supports.
**What are different options for employment, community and day supports?**

- **Day Program**
  - Agency provided program where supports are provided to adults who need help in developing skills, meeting personal needs, and basic daily activities

- **Individualized Habilitation**
  - Support designed for a unique set of activities for one person

- **Employment**
  - **Supported** (support to get and keep a job making minimum wage or higher)
  - **Transitional** (people with disabilities work together with supervision to do specific task in business or industry usually in an enclave or mobile work force)
  - **Pre-vocational** (licensed facility where people learn work-related skills)

**Can I have control over my supports, services and staff?**

YES! You can direct your own supports. There are a number of services that you can direct in the Consolidated and PFDS Waiver. The services that are eligible for Participant-Direction are:

- Unlicensed Habilitation (home and community)
- Unlicensed Respite
- Supported Employment
- Companion Services
- Supports Broker Services
- Homemaker/chore

If you are interested in Participant-Direction, ask your Supports Coordinator for more information.

**Find providers of the different types of services**

There are a few ways to figure out who provides services in your area.

- Use the Office of Developmental Programs’ on-line resource directory [www.hcsis.state.pa.us/hcsis-ssd/pgm/asp/prhom.asp](http://www.hcsis.state.pa.us/hcsis-ssd/pgm/asp/prhom.asp)
- Ask your Supports Coordinator.
- Ask other families and friends.

**STEP 3 List all of the possible providers.**

Once you have a sense of all of the providers who may be able to provide what you want, get contact information.

**STEP 4 Gather information.**

There are a few ways you can find out about the provider. You can and should:

- Interview them on the phone and/or in person.
- Look at the provider’s website.
- Look at the provider’s information in the Provider Profile. [www.hcsis.state.pa.us/hcsis-ssd/pgm/asp/prprd.asp](http://www.hcsis.state.pa.us/hcsis-ssd/pgm/asp/prprd.asp)
- Visit the provider and/or home.
- Ask other families or people with disabilities who use the provider’s services.
- Ask your Supports Coordinator.
Phone Interview

You can eliminate some providers quickly by asking basic questions over the phone. Call the provider to find out if they would be able to provide the support you need to meet your goals.

- Introduce yourself – “I’m calling you to gather information about supports available for me….”
- Share your list of outcomes and goals.
- Ask if they may be able to help you get the life you want.
- If they might be able to support you, ask about the things you know are a “must” for you.
- Ask how to arrange a visit.

Visit and Personal Interview

Once you know who can meet your basic criteria and support you to reach your goals, you need to decide which provider is the best fit. Set up appointments to visit locations, talk with staff, and get more details about the agency.

If you think you are looking for a Community Living Home, what kind of questions would you ask a potential provider?

Here are some examples:

- How do you make sure that each person you support has the life that they want? (Ask for examples).
- How would you describe the philosophy and values of your agency?
- For how long have you provided services and supports in this county and in other counties?
- How many people do you serve?

- May I visit places where you provide services?
- May I talk to people who use your services?
- May I talk with some of your staff?
- May I have a copy of your annual report?
- What are the qualifications of the staff that would be supporting me/my family member?
- What training do you provide to staff who work directly with people? to supervisors?
- Do you have any specialized staff, like nurses or behavioral therapists?
- How long do staff remain with your agency (by position, by site)?
- What is the agency’s management structure in my county, at particular sites (e.g. Is there an office nearby? Is the site managed from afar?)
- How long has the CEO been with this agency? Can you tell me about him/her and his/her background?
- How long have other management staff been with this agency?
- What happens if I have conflict with staff or roommates; how do you handle those situations?

Add your own specific questions:
If you are visiting a home (not just the provider office)
Here are some questions to ask:
• Will I be able to go out as often as I like?
• Will I have my own bedroom? Can I choose my own roommate, if the situation exists?
• Will I be able to decorate my own bedroom?
• Will I share staff? What is the staffing pattern?
• Based on the pattern, will staff be able to meet my needs?
• How will I be able to do activities I enjoy out in the community and at home?
• How many people live in the house?
• What is the procedure for me to visit the home before I make the decision to move?

Add your own specific questions:

What kind of questions would you ask a Lifesharing family?
Here are some examples:
• Why did you decide to become a Lifesharing family?
• Have you provided Lifesharing services before?
• How do you envision including me into your family life?
• How will you and I get to know one another before a decision is made?
• How much involvement can my natural family have?
• How will you support me to achieve my goals?
• How long do you plan on doing Lifesharing?
• Are you planning to support another person as well?

Add your own specific questions:

If you think Lifesharing might be the best option for you, what kind of questions would you ask a provider?
Here are some examples:
• Can you explain the Lifesharing philosophy and history?
• How long have they been providing Lifesharing services?
• What steps are taken for screening, training and approval of a potential Lifesharing family?
• How do you match the person with the Lifesharing family?
• How does the natural family fit into Lifesharing?
• What services are available for people that chose to live in a Lifesharing home?
• Will any current services be lost?
• What happens if the person’s needs change, or the host family has big changes?
• What if I don’t like my new home?
If you think you want supports in your own home or your family home, what kind of questions would you ask a provider?

Here are some examples:

**In-home Support Agency**
- What is your philosophy for support?
- Will I be choosing the staff that come into my home?
- Will I interview each support person?
- How will support people blend into my life at home?
- What can I expect as far as day-to-day? What responsibility will my family have in making this happen? Scheduling? Working on goals?
- Will you make the schedule and plans based on my Individual Support Plan or will I have to do that?
- Who teaches the support person the skills they need and what their job is?
- What happens if my regularly scheduled person is out? What are your back-up plans?

Add your own specific questions:

What if I am directing my own support staff? What questions should I ask?

Here are some examples:

- How will you help me achieve my goals and be successful?
- Why are you interested in providing support to my family member?
- What is your experience in working with people with disabilities?
- Do you have any special training that would help you on this job?
- Are there any situations that make you tense or stressed?
- Please talk about your dependability, flexibility and reliability. What would past employers say about your dependability?

Add your own specific questions:

If you think you want a traditional day program, what kind of questions would you ask a provider?

- What are the hours and where are you located?
- How could you see me learning and growing in this environment?
- Will we get along?
- Are the staff qualified, friendly, and attentive?
- How do you ensure an individualized approach to support?
• Please tell me why this is a place I would like to go to everyday.

Add your own specific questions:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________


If you think you want unique day supports, what kind of questions would you ask a provider?

Here are some examples:

• What experience does this agency have in designing unique individualized supports?

• Does this provider match our personality, habits and values?

• How much time will staff spend in our home, and how will that impact our sense of privacy?

• How much responsibility will the family have in program design and implementation?

• Will this change my family’s routines?

• What are the qualifications of your staff?

Add your own specific questions:

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If you think you want to work and you need support, what kind of questions would you ask a provider?

Here are some examples:

• Will the program be designed around the type of work I might enjoy?

• Are there opportunities to explore new and interesting careers?

• What expertise in job carving and job development does this agency or person have?

• What are my options if I am still learning how to work? Or am I unsure of what I want to do?

Add your own specific questions:

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STEP 5  Weigh each alternative.

Make a list of the advantages and/or disadvantages for each option. Carefully consider how you said you want to live your life.

• Which provider will help you achieve your goals?

• Which provider measures up to what you said you valued?

• Are there any risks to choosing this model of support?

• Are all health and safety issues adequately addressed?

• Are there any downsides associated with this provider?

• Are these things you can work out together?
STEP 6  Make the decision.

Look at whichever provider feels right and comes closest to meeting all your needs and is in-line with your priorities. Remember that you can choose more than one provider in many situations! In some situations, you can also mix traditional agency provided services and direct some supports yourself.

STEP 7  Aim for quality.

To make sure you get the best services, ask and answer questions like this for yourself:

- Are you satisfied with the support?
- Are all the promised services being delivered?
- Are you moving toward your goals?
- Are your needs being met in a way that makes you happy?
- You should evaluate your choice often, to make sure everything stays on track.
- Are you getting the QUALITY OF LIFE you deserve?

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AROUND CHOOSING SERVICES AND SUPPORTS?

- You can choose any qualified willing provider.
- If denied using the provider of your choice, you can appeal that decision.
- For some services, you can cross county and state lines to choose a provider.
- You have the right to see your budget and know how resources are spent for your support.
- You can change providers if you want.

The State Office of Developmental Programs has a toll free phone number for you to call if you have any questions. Additionally, The Partnership and its participating agencies can answer questions and offer assistance to individuals or their families.

Office of Developmental Programs
1-888-565-9435

ODP Regional Point People:
(as of August 2014)

Central
John Witt
717-772-6507
jwitt@pa.gov

Northeast
Robert Conklin
570-963-4749
rconklin@pa.gov

Southeast
Rochelle Zaslow
215-560-2242
rzaslow@pa.gov

Western
Michele O’Toole
412-565-5144
micotoole@pa.gov

The Partnerships:

Achieva
412-995-5000
toll free: 1-888-272-7229
www.achieva.info

Mentors for Self Determination
814-547-1577
www.mentors4sd.org

Self-Advocates United as 1
Eastern 215-923-3349 x132
Western 724-813-5702
www.sau1.org

Vision for Equality
Philadelphia 215-923-3349
Harrisburg 717-233-2424
www.visionforequality.org

Institute on Disabilities at Temple University
215-204-3031
toll free: 1-866-865-6170
www.disabilities.temple.edu