



DISABILITIES WAITING LIST AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT STUDY

SOCIAL SERVICES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
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ISSUE BRIEF

SUMMARY

The Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD) maintains a waiting list for individuals with disabilities who have an immediate need for services. DSPD provides services to new recipients only when funding becomes available either through natural attrition or the Legislature appropriates new funding. All individuals waiting for services are evaluated through a Needs Assessment process. During the 2014 General Session Legislative intent language was approved requesting a report [<http://le.utah.gov/interim/2014/pdf/00005237.pdf>] on the current DSPD Needs Assessment process. When additional funding becomes available the current system allows individuals on the waiting list to be selected in one of two methods based upon: 1) the top Needs Assessment scores and 2) random selection for respite services only. If individuals are in dire need of services they are referred to an Emergency Services Management Committee who may ultimately authorize services. The report also provided an update on supported employment services stating, "Over the last five years, [Supported Work Independence] enrollment levels have risen steadily while the number of people still needing supported employment services has been successfully declining." The report poses four policy questions for Legislators.

Questions

There are four main policy questions related to the report:

- 1. Does the Legislature want to wait and see the results of the University of Utah's Center for Public Policy and Administration (CPPA) effort to develop a "valid and reliable needs assessment tool before deciding if and how to alter Utah's tool?"**
 - CPPA is under contract with DSPD to develop a new tool. This tool may be ready by the 2015 General Session.
- 2. Does the Legislature want to modify current statute regarding the waiting list and the elements considered in evaluating and prioritizing those on that list when funding becomes available?**
 - CPPA has reviewed statute as part of its contract with DSPD. "Up to this point, CPPA has found these [statutory] criteria to be appropriate and serving the state well." The Legislature could consider altering the criteria contained in statute.
 - DSPD has determined 'weighting' in calculating a needs assessment (see the Background section below). This weighting is not prescribed in statute. The Legislature could choose to provide input into the weighting process for those on the waiting list.
- 3. Does the Legislature want to consider adopting systems used in other states to manage disability services waiting lists?**
 - Although states use a variety of names for these lists, all seem to share the common function of managing a list of those eligible for services upon the availability of additional funding. Other state approaches can be grouped into four different categories: 1) no waiting lists (10 states), 2) chronological ranking or *first come first serve*, 3) categorical plus chronological ranking, and 4) scoring criteria or prioritization of needs ranking (Utah fits here).
 - Most states manage a statewide list but many maintain separate lists organized by disability type or applicable Medicaid waiver type.

- States differ in their management styles of the lists and how they prioritize individuals to come off of the waiting list when additional funding becomes available.
- Major factors considered by states include: severity of disability, length of time waiting, crisis/emergency in family, cost of needed service, availability of needed service, age of consumer, advocacy/family influence, anticipated benefit of services, age of parent/caregiver, risk association with the current situation, and termination of current services.

4. Does the Legislature want to leave the current Needs Assessment in place?

Background

DSPD maintains a waiting list for individuals with disabilities who have an immediate need for services. DSPD provides services to new recipients only when funding becomes available either through natural attrition or a Legislature appropriation. All individuals waiting for services are evaluated through a Needs Assessment process. During the 2014 General Session Legislative intent language was approved requesting a report on the current DSPD Needs Assessment process. As mandated by law, the current Needs Assessment process evaluates:

1. urgency of the need,
2. severity of the applicant's disability,
3. caregiver barriers, and
4. length of time spent waiting for services.

DSPD currently weights these 4 factors as follows (with the total maximum possible points adding up to 5.0):

- urgency of the need (2.0),
- caregiver barriers (1.5),
- severity of the applicant's disability (1.0), and
- length of time spent waiting for services (0.5).

Because of "known scoring differences between populations there is a need to standardize raw scores." The four different populations include:

1. people with an acquired brain injury,
2. children with intellectual disabilities or related conditions,
3. adults with intellectual disabilities or related conditions, and
4. people with physical disabilities.

"The impact of standardization is that funding the top 10% of the waiting list is effectively funding the top 10% of each of the four groups. When additional funding becomes available the current system allows individuals on the waiting list to be selected in one of two methods based upon: 1) the top Needs Assessment scores (applies to 85% of new funding and is used for those waiting for services other than respite) and 2) random selection (applies to 15% of new funding and is used for those waiting only for respite services). If individuals are in dire need of services they are referred to an Emergency Services Management Committee who may ultimately authorize services. The report also provided an update on supported employment services stating, "Over the last five years, [Supported Work Independence] enrollment levels have risen steadily while the number of people still needing supported employment services has been successfully declining."