

Division for Developmental Disabilities Supported Living Services Waiver

Supports Intensity Scale (SIS) Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)?

The Supports Intensity Scale is an assessment tool that evaluates practical support requirements of a person with an intellectual disability. A structured interview is used to identify type, frequency and amount of support a person with developmental disabilities needs in order to successfully complete typical tasks or to participate in typical activities. The information from the SIS interview can be used during the individualized planning process to help set goals and services that the person will need to gain more independence in the community.

2. Who wrote the SIS?

The SIS was developed over a five-year period by a team of experts from the American Association on Mental Retardation (now the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities – AAIDD). Since 1876, the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities has been providing leadership in the field of mental retardation. AAIDD is the oldest and largest interdisciplinary organization of professionals (and others) concerned about mental retardation and related disabilities.

3. Why is the SIS going to be used in Colorado?

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which is the federal Medicaid agency, conducted a review of Colorado's Comprehensive Services Waiver in 2004. In November 2005, concerns were raised by CMS that the State did not have a consistent process across all the Community Centered Boards (CCBs) for determining funding levels for individuals in the Medicaid Waiver programs. As a result, the Department of Human Services was directed to develop a new way of determining how levels of funding for services are decided for people with developmental disabilities who are receiving services through the state's Comprehensive Services Waiver and the Supported Living Services Waiver. The State chose the SIS to gather consistent information about people's support needs. Information from the SIS, along with other factors will be used in the future to determine funding levels.

4. What other factors, beside information from the SIS are being considered in determining future funding?

For people in Colorado's Supported Living Services (SLS) Medicaid waiver, other factors include information about the person's living arrangement, services that they may receive from other non-DDD programs, and limitations that their caregivers may have in their ability to provide support. At the end of each SIS interview with an SLS consumer, the consumer and their caregivers will be asked for information about those other factors.

5. Why was the SIS chosen?

The SIS was chosen based on an analysis done by the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI). HSRI is an independent contractor that was hired by the state to analyze assessment tools that the state could utilize to establish tiered funding rates that are tied to consumer support needs. HSRI recommended the SIS and the State agreed for numerous reasons:

- The SIS is principally designed to directly feed into and support the development of person-centered plans by measuring the frequency, intensity and volume of support that individuals need in various dimensions of everyday functioning and living.
- The SIS includes a focus on employment related supports.
- The SIS provides an evaluation of significant medical and behavioral conditions.
- The SIS focuses on an individual's current needs. Although historical usage is important information, the SIS identifies needs for supports that may not have been used in the past.
- The SIS yields reliable and valid information about individual support needs and, thereby, is a foundation for linking funding for such needs.
- The SIS is a national tool that was normed on a sample of over 1,300 adults with intellectual disabilities from thirty-three states and two Canadian provinces.
- Agencies can use the results to help plan for staffing, staff training, budgeting, strategic planning, and evaluation. Systems can use the results for systems planning, program evaluation, and resource allocation.

6. Who is administering the SIS and how were they trained?

Consultants from AAIDD trained 19 individuals from Colorado to train other professionals to be certified SIS interviewers. Everyone who is selected to be a SIS interviewer must be trained and then pass a reliability test before they are allowed to conduct interviews on their own. The State has also developed annual training and review of trainer and interviewer skills.

7. Who should be at the SIS interview?

The individual receiving services should be present and can act as their own respondent or self-reporter. The certified SIS interviewer will make sure that two or more appropriate respondents are included in the SIS interview. An appropriate respondent is someone who knows the individual well and has had recent and frequent contact with them. According to AAIDD, a respondent must have known the person for at least three months (a full year is recommended) and have had recent opportunities to observe the person in one or more environments for substantial periods of time (at least several hours per setting).

Two or three people who know the individual well and who the individual wants to participate, should be present. It is not appropriate to have a large number of people present during a SIS interview. The consumer, the interviewer and a few respondents are essential.

8. How long does a SIS interview take?

The average amount of time for an interview is about 2 hours. There is a very specific way that the questions are to be asked. In addition, in order to maintain the validity of the assessment, interviewers have to ask all the questions on the assessment, even if the answer appears to be obvious. It is perfectly okay to ask for a break if you or your family member needs one.

9. Does everyone have to have a SIS Assessment?

Everyone in the Medicaid SLS or Comprehensive Waiver Programs must have this assessment because information from the SIS will be used (in addition to other factors) in establishing Medicaid funding.

10. Can I get a copy of my SIS Interview Form?

Yes, let the interviewer or your case manager know if you want a copy. The interviewer or your case manager can send you one after the results are scored and graphed.

11. When an individual uses assistive technology, is the SIS administered with the assistive technology in place?

Yes. This applies only to assistive technology that the person already has. For example, if a person has an assistive device (communication device, wheel chair, hearing aid and so on) they would be scored with the device in place.

12. Is the intent of this new method for determining funding to reduce funding for all consumers?

No, the State is not reducing the amount of funds that are appropriated for these two Waivers. The intent is to have a fair method for distributing those funds among all the Waiver participants based upon their support needs and other pertinent factors.

13. What was the role of persons in services, parents and family members in selecting the SIS?

HSRI had separate meetings with each of a group of self-advocates, the Arc of Colorado and directors of local Arc chapters, the DDD Policy Advisory Committee, CCB representatives, provider agency representatives, and DDD officials to discuss the selection of an assessment tool that would help determine funding rates. Comments from all groups were taken into consideration when making the final decision.

14. What if I have a concern or complaint about the SIS Interview process?

If you have concerns about the SIS interview, there is a process for filing a complaint regarding the SIS Interview. It can be found – along with other SIS information on the DDD website at <http://www.cdhs.state.co.us/ddd/UserGuidesManualsReferenceMaterial.htm> Scroll down to the SIS Section and click on SIS Complaint Procedure. Also the SIS interviewer or your case manager will be able to provide you with a copy.

15. Where can I get more information about the SIS and its use in Colorado?

For more information about the use of the SIS in Colorado, contact Gail Bernstein at the Division for Developmental Disabilities, gail.bernstein@state.co.us or 303-866-7143. For general information about the SIS instrument go to: www.siswebsite.org.

16. What is the reliability and validity of the SIS? What studies are there to show that it measures what it is supposed to?

For technical information about the SIS, see the website at: <http://www.siswebsite.org/page.wv?section=Product+Info&name=Quick+Facts>