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**Note**

This document was  
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**From the Assistant Commissioner, Developmental Services**

*My Life, My Community* is an initiative of the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to improve services for people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (I/DD). An important part to this effort involves an assessment of support needs using the Supports Intensity Scale® (SIS). Of course, this assessment cannot pinpoint the specific supports a person needs day-to-day. These specifics are best determined during planning meetings to set individual person-centered plans. In other words, the SIS assessment should not direct the makeup of a plan, but the information it provides may be used to inform the plan. In addition, the SIS information will help DBHDS understand the amount of support a person needs in relation to other people receiving services.



In fact, based on the SIS assessment and responses to supplemental questions (if needed), each person aged 16 and above, receiving services, will be assigned to one of seven support levels, generally from least to most support. A person's level assignment will, in turn, allow DBHDS to estimate the average type and amount of services a person might use, depending on his or her age and place of residence. This approach will help individuals to get the services they need to live in the community. It will also help DBHDS to allocate resources fairly and to serve as many as possible.

There are many parts to this process that are still being developed. The purpose of this *Information Brief* is to describe the SIS and how it is used to form the seven assessment levels. What follows are responses to commonly asked questions about the seven levels.



**What is the Supports Intensity Scale?**

Presently, there are two versions of the SIS. The "Child SIS" (SIS-C) is for children aged 5 to 15 years. The "Adult-SIS" (SIS-A) is for individuals aged 16 to 72 years old. The seven level assessment framework that has been developed pertains only to individuals assessed using the Adult SIS.

The SIS-A was created by researchers working with the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD). It has been in use since 2004 and is a reliable and accurate tool for measuring the supports needs of individuals with I/DD. There are three sections.

Section 1 Support Needs Index: This section documents the general support needs of individuals, in terms of how often the support is needed, how long it takes to provide the support each time, and what type of assistance is needed. Six sub-sections address the major areas in which support is typically needed:

An important part to the effort involves an assessment of support needs using the Supports Intensity Scale® (SIS). The SIS-A was created by researchers working with the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD).

Learn More  
<http://aaid.org/sis>

This version of the SIS has been in use since 2004 and has been shown to reliably and accurately measure the supports needs of individuals with I/DD.

Part A: Home Living Activities  
Part B: Community Living Activities  
Part C: Lifelong Learning Activities

Part D: Employment Activities  
Part E: Health and Safety Activities  
Part F: Social Activities

**Section 2 Supplemental Protection and Advocacy Scale:** This section examines the types of activities the individual performs to protect and advocate for himself or herself. As in Section 1, each activity is rated in terms of frequency, time, and type of support.

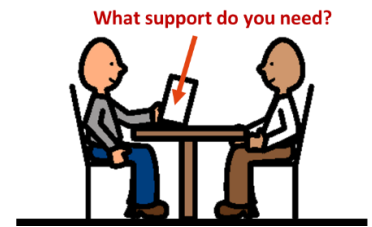
**Section 3 Exceptional Medical and Behavioral Needs:** This section documents extra support needed to deal with particular medical and behavioral conditions, above and beyond the regular daily supports covered in Section 1. Two subsections address these domains:

Part A: Medical Supports Needed  
Part B: Behavioral Supports Needed



### Why did the Commonwealth decide to update SIS assessments for all current HCBS waiver participants?

DBHDS understands that people may have already been assessed in the past using the SIS. Going forward, however, the Commonwealth needs to assure that all SIS assessments are administered by interviewers that are endorsed by AAIDD. This approach will help assure the accuracy and reliability of the information that is collected throughout the state and provide DBHDS the best information on individual support needs. As a result, a fresh round of new assessments was begun, facilitated by trained and endorsed interviewers.



### What is the “seven level” assessment framework?

Assessment results are used to assign individuals to one of seven levels, labeled 1 through 7, related to their support needs. These levels are not associated with AAIDD or the SIS developers, but were developed by DBHDS and its consultants. Level 1 represents those with the lowest support needs while Levels 6 and 7 represent individuals with the highest need for support.

**Level 1:** Adults in this level have some but largely mild need for support, including little to no support need for medical and behavioral challenges. They can manage many aspects of their lives independently or with little assistance. This includes activities like eating or dressing, as well as daily living activities such as shopping or going out into the community.

**Level 2:** Adults in this level have modest or moderate support needs and little to no support needs for medical and behavioral challenges. Although they need more support than those in Level 1, their support needs are minimal in a number of life areas.

**Level 3:** Adults in this level have little to moderate support needs as in Levels 1 and 2. They also have an increased, but not significant, support needs due to behavioral challenges.

*Based on the SIS assessment and other factors, each person receiving services aged 16 and above will be assigned to one of seven support levels, generally from least to most support.*

*Particular responses pertaining to medical and behavioral needs trigger a series of Supplemental Questions.*

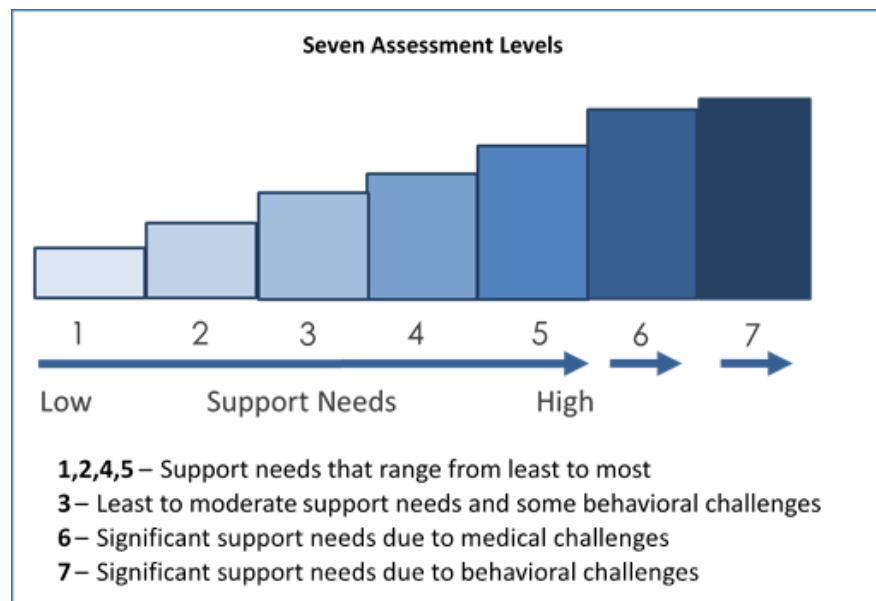
**Level 4:** Adults in this level have moderate to high need for support. They may have behavioral support needs that are not significant but range from none to above average.

**Level 5:** Adults in this level have high to maximum support needs. They may have behavioral support needs that are not significant but range from none to above average.

**Level 6:** Adults in this level have significant need for medical support but also may have similar support needs to individuals in Level 5. Individuals in this level may have some need for support due to behavior that is not significant but may range from none to above average.

**Level 7:** Adults in this level have significant behavioral challenges, regardless of their support need to complete daily activities or for medical conditions. These adults typically need significantly enhanced supports due to their behavioral challenges.

The graphic below illustrates these levels. Levels 1, 2, 4 and 5 include individuals from less to more need, but Levels 3, 6 and 7 include individuals with modest behavioral challenges (3), complex medical needs (6) and extraordinary behavioral challenges (7).



### **Are other factors considered when assigning a person to a level?**

Yes. During the SIS assessment, particular responses pertaining to medical and behavioral needs trigger a series of **Supplemental Questions**. These questions gather additional information particular to either medical and/or behavioral support needs. The supplemental questions cover these four topics:

1. Severe medical risk;
2. Severe community safety risk for people with a related legal conviction;
3. Severe community safety risk for people with no related legal conviction;
4. Severe risk of harm to self.

*A representative sample of over 1,300 adults receiving I/DD services were assessed using the SIS. Analysis of these data helped DBHDS set criteria to define each of the seven levels.*

*In addition to assessing individual support needs, DBHDS is working on several other complementing activities to improve the range of services available to individuals.*

Each supplemental question has five individual items, labeled A through E. “Yes” responses to these items trigger eligibility for individual case review or verification. After the review, the individual may or may not be assigned to Level 6 (medical) or Level 7 (behavioral).

Keep in mind that later, when DBHDS ties assessment levels to assumptions about the type and amount of resources needed to support individuals, two other factors will be considered. These include the individual’s age and where he or she lives (e.g., with family, a community residence like a group home, sponsored living). Also, an “exceptions process” will be available so that individual cases can be reviewed as needed.



### What criteria are used to define each assessment level?

The SIS allows for scale scores to be calculated related to various sections. To assign individuals to an assessment level the following information is used:

- The sum of the standard, not “raw,” scale scores in Parts A, B, and E in Section 1. These include scales on Home Living Activities, Community Living Activities and Health and Safety Activities. This score may potentially range from 8 to 52, with lower scores reflecting less overall need for support.
- Scale scores associated with Section 3, Part A on Medical Needs (scored 0-32) and Part B on Behavioral Needs (scored 0-26). Again, lower scores indicate less overall need.
- Responses to Supplemental Questions. When particular SIS items in Parts 3A or 3B trigger these supplemental questions, the responses are recorded. Given an individual case review and verification of extraordinary support needs, individuals may be assigned to Level 6 or 7.

A representative sample of over 1,300 adults receiving I/DD services was assessed using the SIS. Analysis of these data helped DBHDS to set criteria to define each of the seven levels.

7 Levels and Brief Description	SIS Sum Scales ABE	Section 3A Medical Support	Section 3B Behavior Support
1 Least Support Needs	0 to 22	0 to 6	0 to 6
2 Modest or Moderate Support Needs	23 to 30	0 to 6	0 to 6
3 Least /Moderate Support Needs with Some Behavioral	0 to 30	0 to 6	7 to 10
4 Moderate to high Support Needs	31 to 36	0 to 6	0 to 10
5 High to maximum Support Needs	37 to 52	0 to 6	0 to 10
6 Extraordinary Medical Support Needs	Any	7 to 32 or Verified Extraordinary medical risk	0 to 10
7 Extraordinary Behavioral Support Needs	Any	Any	11 to 26 or Verified Danger to others or Extreme self-injury risk

*DBHDS is seeking to improve the range of services available to individuals with I/DD.*

*DBHDS expects people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities will have greater control over their services and also get the supports they need to live in and be part of their communities*



## What happens next and where could I get more information?

In addition to assessing individual support needs, DBHDS is working on several other complementing activities. For instance, DBHDS is seeking to improve the range of services available to individuals, while also adjusting the rates that providers are paid for delivering services.

Eventually, DBHDS will combine the information provided by the SIS with other complementing actions to help set “individualized budget allocations” for service recipients. By doing so, DBHDS expects that people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities will have greater control over their services and also get the supports they need to live in and be part of their communities.

For more information DBHDS’ *My Life, My Community* initiative, please check the agency website at: [www.dbhds.virginia.gov](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov)

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## Learn More



**Visit the new DBHDS website at [www.dbhds.virginia.gov](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov).**

Once there,

- ✓ 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.



**Visit the AAIDD website at [www.aaidd.org/sis](http://www.aaidd.org/sis) to learn about the Supports Intensity Scale.**