

What We Heard: Increasing Flexibility for Families
Summary of 2009-2010 Family Managed Services
Stakeholder Consultations

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Introduction

The Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) program works with others to support adults with developmental disabilities to be included in community life and to be as independent as possible. The six Priority Actions that have been identified for the program focus on achieving positive outcomes for people being supported, and on ensuring the program is sustainable for years to come.

The PDD program offers a direct funding option that allows families to hire their own staff or to contract with a PDD approved service provider for services. This option is referred to as Family Managed Services (FMS). Under Priority Action #4, the PDD program was tasked with examining current practices in FMS and developing policy recommendations to simplify FMS while maintaining accountability. The expected outcomes of this priority action include:

- Improved outcomes and satisfaction for adults with developmental disabilities receiving supports
- Increased number of families participating in managing their own supports
- Increased satisfaction of families
- Reduced pressures in the community service provider sector as the strengths and capacities of families, community, and natural supports are maximized.

The PDD program engaged The Vocational and Rehabilitation Society Institute (VRRI) to conduct stakeholder consultations to gather feedback from families and PDD approved service providers who are involved in FMS, adults with developmental disabilities, and PDD Community Board staff. Also, input was obtained from self-advocates and two advisory groups – Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) and member agencies, and Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) and family members. This summary outlines the stakeholder engagement process, which took place from September 2009 to June 2010, and summarizes the issues and ideas presented by participants. The PDD program appreciates the contributions made by all individuals involved in these sessions.

Stakeholder Engagement Process

VRRI consulted with 124 families and 6 service providers involved in FMS, and 47 PDD program staff through focus groups and interviews. Consultations also took place with fifteen self-advocates through a focus group session. As well, input was obtained from two advisory groups – the ACDS Member Agencies Advisory Group comprised of regional representatives, and the AACL Family/Member Advisory Group also comprised of regional family representatives. The stakeholders were asked to provide feedback regarding their perspective on “what is working well” in FMS, “what is not working,” and “what they would like to see changed.”

What We Heard

The consultations revealed four broad areas for change: the Family Managed Services Agreement (FMSA), funding, resources and supports for families, and communication.

The Family Managed Services Agreement (FMSA)

Stakeholders noted that the detail of the current contract outlining roles, responsibilities and accountabilities was helpful and Individual Service Plans allowed families to create a program in line with the outcomes and needs of their family member. However, the complexity of the agreement made it inaccessible, confusing and overwhelming for some families. It was noted that changes to the contract requirements lead to misunderstandings among families and staff, and that more consistency in the FMSA was needed. Specific changes identified were:

- Simplify contract language
- Simplify contract requirements (e.g. commercial liability insurance, monthly invoicing)
- Simplify contract amendment process

Funding

Participants noted that FMS provides families with a level of funding and flexibility that adequately allows them to best meet the needs of their family member. However, families noted that this level of funding did not appear to be consistent among families or across individuals with similar needs. Given the economic situation, families also identified a concern over the stability of their funding over time. Specific changes identified included:

- Consistent level of funding and services for individuals with similar needs (e.g. for existing families and new families)
- Flexibility to allocate funding as needed
- Increased security and stability of FMS funding (e.g. multi-year contracts)

Resources and Supports for Families

Under the FMS funding option, families are required to assume more responsibility in the provision of supports, including hiring and training support staff and carrying out responsibilities typical of an employer (payroll, monitoring, etc). In the stakeholder sessions, participants stated that additional tools would help ensure effective delivery of supports to adults with developmental disabilities. Families also expressed a need for increased clarity around responsibilities and expectations under the FMS funding option in order to assist in making an informed choice about whether or not to enter into an FMS contract. Specific tools identified were:

- Access to information on all contracting options to support informed choices by families transitioning into FMS. Families also wanted support from PDD staff on navigating the PPD program and appeals process.
- Training and supports for PDD Community Board staff around the FMS funding option
- Training tools and support to assist with employer responsibilities (e.g. recruiting, managing/monitoring workers, training for workers, labour standards, payroll)

- Networking options (e.g. internet, community groups, family networking)

Communication

Stakeholders identified that communication around the FMS funding option could be enhanced to increase effectiveness and success in the achievement of personal outcomes for their family member. Families indicated that communication was strongest between families and PDD Community Board staff through direct contact with Client Service Coordinators (CSCs). In order to avoid confusion and errors, it was suggested that efforts be made to improve communication between the PDD Community Board staff, families, service providers, community advocacy groups and federal and provincial government departments involved in FMS. Stakeholders further expressed a need for clear, well-informed communication that is consistent within and across regions, the need to provide family-friendly information in a variety of formats and to communicate all service options to families in a neutral, factual manner. Specific suggestions included:

- Increase consultation when developing new policies/procedures
- Develop easy-to-understand materials on FMS (e.g. brochures and information sheets to post on PDD website). Also, provide information on the two options available through FMS - hiring staff or contracting with a service provider agency to provide supports - as families were not aware of both options
- Consider non-traditional ways to provide standard information about the FMS funding option (e.g. personal stories, short video on web site)