Self-Direction Advisory Board

December 6, 2023

Board Members Attending

Nancy Alterio

Margaret Abrams

Liz Fahey

Ann Fracht

Karla Murphy

Michael Weiner

Barbara Pandolfi

Cindy Thomas

Julie Westwater

Julie Flaherty

Kimberly Truong

Rich Santucci

Robin Foley

Jeff Keilson

Leo Sarkissian

Michelle Goody

DDS Staff

Ed Wilson

Amy Nazaire

Julia Wojeciechowski

Teryl Smith

Tim Cahill

Elizabeth Morse

Chris Klaskin

Laney Bruner-Canhoto

Jaclyn Grant

Guests

John Hunt-Public Partnerships

Nancy Alterio called the meeting to order. Liz Sandblom read the roll call.

Nancy asked for motions to accept the September 6th minutes.

First Motion: Rich Santucci

Second Motion: Ann Fracht

Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Ryder’s Report

Secretary Walsh has embarked on a strategic plan and has brought on a consultant to work with all the agencies under EHS. Herf hope is that all of our goals and initiatives will funnel up to EHS and there will be clear direction and goal that she as the secretary can achieve. Has already identified themes throughout the different agencies: equity (race/ethnicity/geography), constituent centric, develop a culture of innovation, wants human services to be a place people want to work, we are all stewards of the Commonwealth’s resources. Innovative supports and services to individuals with IDD and live their best lives and be seen heard and thrive in their own communities. Focusing on IT infrastructure. Our client record database is our biggest project right now. Access to services is our second priority (SIS-A assessment). Current assessment system is not recognized with people with autism and will be a major factor on how we tie the budgeting process in self-direction. 3rd initiative: workforce we want to do much more in recruiting and retaining staff. Attracting the best, paying a fair wage and really show that human services is a career opportunity for people. Regulations: just about a year ago public hearing and received a lot of comment. For the past year we have been reaching out to stakeholders across the board and getting input from a variety of different groups. We have tweaked the regs based on the feedback. Public hearing after the first of the year and will give people plenty of notice so they can join. Committed to get more input and discussion across the board on all advisory boards and want to move back to in person meetings. This will help us get input and facilitate discussions better. We may try to go back to Waltham where we used to meet.

Questions/Comments

Q: Timelines for initiatives and how does it have an effect on your overall staffing?

A: Client database-turn on CMCCS in April 2024 it is such a large system that is tied to so many aspects. We will still be adding things after this date. Rely heavily on the consultant and our IT staff for this project. We have not had to add staff to get this going.

Liz Sandblom: Some volunteers are on the call today. It’s important to get infrastructure in place for this project. We hired 2 program coordinators who will be helping us organize all the components that go into scheduling and communicating with individuals and families. We will be hiring 2 more coordinators and be providing opportunities to DDS staff to become assessors. Hoping to have between 20-25 assessors. For geographical purpose they will be loosely tied to different area office. There will be a director and all assessors and coordinators will report up to them.

Barbabra Pandolfi: These meetings are so much better in person and is a good move. Jam packed agendas and don’t have much time for input.

Jane Ryder: We have to do a better job of devoting time in each meeting to get feedback from our advisory board members. We will do a better job when developing agendas to leave enough time to give input.

Kim Truong: I’m excited to hear Secretary Walsh is prioritizing equity.

Jane: We didn’t assertively ask individuals to answer these questions about race and ethnicity and we have begun to do that. During COVID there were so many inequities, and she wants every agency to better job with this.

Liz Sandblom: The SIS-A will help level the playing field for people.

Q: Will there be a call-in option for SDAB meetings?

A: We will take that under advisement. We are happy to help people coordinate with others if there are transition challenges.

Regional Updates- Amy Nazaire

We have been working hard on the Soup to Nuts training which is a 7-week training series for support brokers and DDS staff. The last session will be happening next week. We offer these twice a year. We continue with our regular information sessions. The flyer with dates for Jan-Mar will be coming soon and posted on our website. Spanish info sessions will be scheduled. DDS 101 training is being offered on an ongoing basis along with Service Coordinator Institute. We had a 3-day Charting the Life Course event in October and a steering committee has been formed. Liz and I are representing self-direction. We are trying to expedite and coordinate training dedicated support brokers. There have been a few meet ups in the North Shore for individuals. The support broker has also been doing a self-direction huddle. The dedicated support brokers have really started to embrace their roles and taken on some leadership roles.

Waiver and Self-Directed Services- Melissa Alvarez, Liz Sandblom, & Laney Bruner-Canhoto

See PowerPoint presentation

Questions/Comments

Q: Is paying family member a Massachusetts rule or does CMS dictate that?

A: It’s based on guidance from CMS but our waiver is specific to Massachusetts.

Leo Sarkissian: A lot of what is in the waiver is really MA policy that gets put into the waiver but was presented as federal requirements. What we’re hoping is that this group talks about this and we can revise the waiver to meet the needs of individuals and families. We may need to have a sub meeting to discuss the waiver. I worry about by not allowing the breadth of budget authority we are doing a disservice.

Liz Sandblom: Massachusetts is unique in that we provide services to people whether or not they are on the waiver. This is not the case in other states. In MA, DDS doesn’t own the waivers. Medicaid and MassHealth own the waivers. We suggest language and changes but there is a bigger picture that gets looked at. Consistency across waivers is ensured by MassHealth.

Q: If someone chooses not to be covered under the waiver does it inhibit DDS’ ability to provide services?

A: We strongly encourage people to be on the waiver but do take things on a case-by-case basis.

Path Forward & Independent Facilitator (IF)- Robin Foley & Liz Sandblom

Robin Foley: The subcommittee has been discussing the Real Lives Law and the IF role. This additional service provides individuals help to design their supports or shape their supports/schedule. We are still discussing what this professional role will look like. We’re introducing this as a topic to all of you to give us feedback. How are personal agent services being used if you know someone who is using them.

Liz Sandblom: This is something that has been on our radar and important for us. We need to do a better job about making it available and be clear about what the definition is and what roles and responsibilities are. We need to make sure it doesn’t duplicate what our staff do. We have pulled some definitions form other states and are working on developing a definition. The subcommittee agrees that it is complex.

Comments/Questions

Leo Sarkissian: One thing to think about is you can’t pay for the same thing 3 different ways. We need to step back and make sure we are not duplicating the supports DDS provides as the support brokers roles are very similar to the independent facilitator. It’s important to get it on the wavier so that MA can get reimbursed.

Anne: I have had a support broker for 1 year and it is similar to what you are describing as an IF. We communicate weekly to see how things are going with my support person. They help me plan out the week and go through what I am doing. They give me advice. He is the person I go to with a problem. Not sure my new SC understands that yet.

PPL Updates - John Hunt

I’m back on MA team at PPL. Moving forward please reach out to me if you need anything. We have new service codes updates for behavioral supports based on education level. We have been talking about streamlining the hiring process by having an electronic application option. DDS and PPL is in the process of ironing out the details. Adobe sign will be used to complete the applications. Fields will be prepopulated and can electronically sign the necessary pages. Paper applications will still be available.

Interim Assessment and Service Caps – Leo Sarkissian

We’re still in an unbelievable crisis. We need to develop a consistent assessment strategy. We have processes that DDS uses now for CBDS (CDAT) and residential supports process that give you a ballpark of how much someone needs. The CDAT could be used as a tool for day services. Second piece is that it’s essential to have the budget authority. The budget authority is capped which is a problem. People’s ability to get help is greatly impacted by this. We could set up general guardrails that then allow for random audits to ensure budget authority is being used properly. It may double the amount of people using self-direction.

Comments/Questions

Rich Santucci: We are in the process of launching the SIS-A assessment which was recommended by HSRI and our efforts are going into that right now. It seems complex, my reacting as member of the group we are better off focusing on the goal which is the SIS A.

Leo Sarkissian: That is going to take a few years.

Q: Are you speaking on behalf of people who are still struggling since the pandemic? Could you define the budget authority cap a little further?

A: I’m speaking on behalf of Arc of MA and MA21. The consistency piece has been an issue. Budget authority gives the people the ability to access goods and services. Sometimes there are unreasonable things being requested, but there was a situation where someone was taking ballet classes which regulated her that should have been paid for.

Q: So, you’re speaking to an appeal process rather than an interim process?

A: They are 2 different pieces; consistency with allocations and full budget authority. Some people can reach out to their Area Director and get more money but that is not consistent across the board.

Liz Fahey: The SIS is going to take time and in my role I’m seeing a lot of confusion from families. People are panicking and we’re trying to resolve in the long term and is causing a lot of confusion. It’s an important discussion to have as we work toward the SIS-A.

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Public Comment

Robert Beckett: Speaking on behalf of MA 21 and my son Thomas, my understanding is that the 3 waivers have been extended through 2028 and they can be amended. The amendment process is fairly straight forward and there are issues with budget authority that can be addressed. Real Lives Law states that DDS will offer IF services and the regulations did not include the IF role. I hope the new ones describe the IF because my son has been deprived of the choice of IF for years now.

Laney: DDS is in the process for procuring a heath equity review vendor to remove structural and systemic barriers for program design, service providers etc. digging in deep on this topic.

Nancy asked for motions to adjourn.

First motion: Leo Sarkissian

Second motion: Michelle Goody

Next Meeting: Bruner-Canhoto

Respectfully submitted,

Jaclyn Grant