

SELF-DIRECTION PROGRAMS



Frequently Asked Questions for Agency with Choice Program

1. **Q: If I want to Self-Direct my DDS services with the Agency with Choice (AWC) how would I get started?**

A: To be enrolled in the **Agency with Choice** you should contact your DDS Service Coordinator. A person must be eligible for adult DDS services, have an assessed need and be prioritized for DDS services with an allocation. You must be willing to work with a DDS Service Coordinator as needed to learn about the aspects of the Agency with Choice.

2. **Q: At what age, can someone enroll in the Agency with Choice?**

A: Typically, DDS adult services begin at age 22 when school services end. Individuals who are eligible for ASD (Autism Services without Intellectual Disability) can receive services when they are 18 and leave school. Other situations should be discussed with your Service Coordinator or Area Office.

3. **Q. How does AWC differ from a traditional service provider?**

A. When an individual/family selects a traditional provider agency to deliver supports, the agency assumes the full responsibility for the hiring, screening, training, supervising and managing of the employee. When an individual/family chooses AWC they are entering into an agreement with the provider agency to share those responsibilities. Ideally the participant/family identify employees to hire however if they do not have anyone in their network the agency can assist in finding employees.

4. **Q. How is my AWC budget determined?**

A. Each Individual utilizing AWC is allocated a budget by the Department of Developmental Services based on identified needs. This budget allows for gross wages, tax and fringe for workers hired to provide support services identified, goods and services, navigation hours and an administrative fee. In the planning process with the AWC provider, families make decisions about how their budgets are divided up between gross wages and goods and services within program guidelines.

5. **Q. Who is responsible for identifying and screening new employees?**

A. The AWC Provider is responsible for screening and vetting activities to include criminal background checks, fingerprinting, references, etc. Agencies are required to follow Federal and State Regulatory requirements. The AWC Service Navigator will support the individual and family in all activities related to the employment process including: creating job descriptions, writing advertisements, helping families identify resources and places to recruit workers, participate in interviews of identified applicants, help facilitate the hiring process, negotiate and establish rates of pay, and assist in completing annual performance evaluations.

6. Q. Can I hire a family member to be an employee?

A. You may not hire a spouse or legal guardians to provide any services. Other family members may be hired as employees if they meet the AWC Provider's requirements. You should speak with your AWC Service Navigator and DDS Service Coordinator about specific guidance related to hiring family members.

7. Q. Who has the final decision about hiring a potential employee?

A. The AWC Provider has the final decision about hiring a potential employee because they are an employee of the agency. This means that the AWC Provider must agree to interview and screen potential candidates brought to their attention, and act in good faith and try to hire the people identified. However, the final decision about hiring belongs to the agency.

8. Q. Who is responsible for paying the employee?

A. The AWC Provider is responsible for processing payroll and employee timesheets. The individual/family is responsible for signing the employee timesheets in a timely manner, and in accordance with agency policies. No timesheets will be processed without employee, family/individual/supervisor signatures.

In addition, withholding, filing, and paying of all Federal, State, and local income and employment taxes, providing workers compensation and unemployment insurance, benefits, as well as issuing W-2 forms or 1099's (when appropriate) are the AWC provider's responsibility.

9. Q. Who decides what the employee will be paid and what benefits the employee will receive?

A. State law determines what the minimum amount a worker can be paid. The Department of Developmental Services has established a maximum amount that an employee, hired through AWC, can be paid. Employee pay rates and benefits are determined by the individual/family in consultation with the AWC Service Navigator. The individual/family can decide when to give pay raises. Please keep in mind raises cannot exceed the pay rates established by the Department of Developmental Services nor can the family spend more money than their budget allows. If the family decides to give an employee a raise, they must do this within their existing budget which means the individual may receive less hours of support services. Pay raises can only be given in consultation with the AWC Service Navigator.

10. Q. Who decides on the employee's daily schedule?

A. The individual/family is responsible for creating and managing the schedule of employees based on the hours that are determined by the individual's budget. The individual/family decides on the daily duties of the employee.

It is the responsibility of the individual/family to develop a backup plan, when necessary, for support if the employee is unable to come to work. Not all situations require a back-up plan. Schedules and time-off requests are determined by the individual/family, but they will need to share that information with the AWC Provider.

11. Q. Who is responsible for managing the day to day responsibilities?

A. The individual/family is responsible for assigning meaningful activities and the day to day management of staff. The AWC Provider is available to provide information, possible resources, and guidance on the training and supervision of employees.

12. Q. Who decides on the training the employee needs to have?

A. The AWC Provider is responsible for providing the required trainings identified by the Department of Developmental Services (First Aid, CPR, Abuse and Incident Reporting-DPPC and Basic Safety Training, Preventing Financial Abuse and Exploitation). All employees must be certified in First Aid and CPR before they can support individuals alone. The individual/family is responsible for providing training on the daily support needs of the individual, as well as any other specific trainings that they want and believe are important to the delivery of quality supports and will be responsive to their unique needs. Individual agencies may require additional trainings in accordance with their best practices.

Please note that employees are paid for all their training time from the individual's budget, including the time to complete any mandatory training.

13. Q. Who evaluates the employee's job performance?

A. The AWC Service Navigator is responsible for assisting individual/families to complete an annual performance review on each employee.

14. Q. How is communication maintained between the individual/family and AWC Provider?

A. At the time of enrollment there is an agreement developed between the AWC provider and the individual/family, which outlines roles and responsibilities of each party. There is regular communication between the individual/family, AWC Service Navigator and DDS service coordinator through informal phone calls, emails and meetings as needed.

In addition, the AWC Service Navigator will set up quarterly face-to-face meetings to include discussion on; satisfaction with services, updates on the individual's AWC budget, staffing updates, progress the individual is making toward ISP goals, difficulties, concerns, and rates of pay for AWC staff.

15. Q. Who is responsible for managing the individual AWC budget?

A. It is the individual/family's responsibility to manage their budget. The AWC Service Navigator will provide to the individual/family "consumer-friendly" financial statements every month that reflects all expenditures to include gross wages, tax and benefits and flexible funding expenditures. These reports, along with informal conversations with the Service Navigator, help the family maintain and adjust spending throughout the year.

16. Q. Can a portion of the budget be utilized for "Goods and Services"?

A. Prior to purchases being made a discussion with the AWC Service Navigator should occur to ensure adherence with DDS guidelines. The individual/family is responsible for submitting all receipts in a timely manner to the AWC Service Navigator to ensure reimbursement. Payments can also be made to a vendor directly for services rendered on behalf of an individual.

17. Q. Can individuals/families participating in AWC services also participate in traditional service programs?

A. Yes, it is possible to have a combination of traditional services and AWC services. You should discuss with your DDS Service Coordinator.

18. Q. Can individuals who reside in 24/7 DDS funded residential programs receive AWC services?

A. Yes, but for day services only.

19. Q. Can individuals/families switch to/from AWC services any time during the year?

A. Yes, individuals/families may switch services at any time during the fiscal year, but the planning and coordination needs to be done in consultation with their DDS Service Coordinator.