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# The Supports Intensity Scale (SIS-A®) Fact Sheet

## What is the SIS-A?

The SIS is an interview tool that measures the support needs, or level of assistance, a person with developmental disabilities needs to fully participate in their community. The SIS was developed over a five-year period by a team of experts from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (A-A-I-D-D). This team included self-advocates, family members, and professionals in the field of developmental disabilities. A-A-I-D-D has been providing leadership in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1876.

The SIS-A is an interview tool that assesses the support needs, or level of assistance, a person with developmental disabilities requires to fully participate in their community. Over a five-year period, a team of experts from the American Associate on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (A-A-I-D-D) developed the SIS. This team included self-advocates, family members, and professionals in the field of developmental disabilities. A-A-I-D-D has been providing leadership in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1876.

## Why is the SIS-A different?

Traditionally, a person's level of developmental disability has been measured by the skills she or he lacks. The SIS-A focuses not on what a person lacks or cannot do but on what the pattern and intensity of support a person with developmental disabilities needs to live as independently and successfully as possible in the community. The SIS gathers information about each person's unique support needs.

## What does the SIS-A measure?

The SIS-A measures support needs in the areas of home living, community living, lifelong learning, work, health and safety, advocacy, and social activities. It also looks at extra support needed to deal with exceptional medical and behavioral needs. Supports are rated according to frequency, amount, and type of support in accordance with the A-A-I-D-D rating key guidelines.

## Who should participate in the SIS-A interview?

Those attending the interview are often referred to as respondents. To complete a SIS-A there must be at least two respondents who have known the individual at least three months. Respondents may include family, guardians, friends, direct support staff and provider staff. Respondents must be able to speak to the supports the individual needs to be successful in current and potential situations. The respondents must know the individual well in one or more environments.

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## What about the individual, should they participate in the SIS-A interview?

The individual receiving services is encouraged to participate in the interview, but it is not required. If the individual does not attend the interview the interviewer will need to meet the individual in one of their environments, preferably before the interview. If the individual chooses to serve as a self-respondent, they must be able to describe their support needs accurately and reliably across everyday activities. The legal decision maker is not required to attend; however, their participation is encouraged.

## How long will the SIS-A interview take?

The length of time for each interview will vary ranging from 1.5 to 3.0 hours. An average interview usually lasts 2.0 hours. Respondents should be prepared to stay for the duration of the interview.

## How should respondents prepare to participate in a SIS-A interview?

Respondents should assure their calendar is clear for the date and time of the interview keeping in mind the interview may last up to 3.0 hours. The respondents will provide detailed information related to the support needs of the individual. The knowledge of the individual's abilities and needs is what is necessary to fulfill the responsibilities as a respondent. It is important that answers be accurate without over or under estimating abilities and support needs. The interviewer will explain the interview process and assessment including the assessment areas and rating key for each portion of the assessment.

## How often will a SIS-A interview be completed?

The SIS-A will be completed once every three years for individuals aged 16 and older. The person's Developmental Disabilities Program Manager will provide communication of the results and any needed follow-up. If there is a significant change in an individual's life, a request can be made to complete a new SIS-A prior to the third year.

## Who conducts the SIS-A interview?

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has contracted with a third-party vendor, The Rushmore Group, as an independent entity to conduct the interviews. The Rushmore Group has been conducting the SIS-a interviews in North Dakota since 2012. Each interviewer has at least a baccalaureate degree and experience working with and on behalf of people with developmental disabilities. Each interviewer completes extensive initial and annual training to meet A-A-I-D-D certification standards. The interviewer's role is to listen closely to respondents, ask additional questions when needed and integrate information from multiple respondents.

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## Why did North Dakota choose the SIS-A?

North Dakota hired a consultant to research and analyze available assessment tools. They looked for assessments that were: (a) reliable and valid; (b) standardized for individuals with developmental disabilities; (c) designed for person-centered planning; (d) able to measure the pattern and intensity (or type, frequency and daily support time) of an individual's support needs (not be deficit based); and (e) successfully used in other states. The consultant recommended the SIS-A, and it is now in state law.

## How will the information gathered during the SIS-A interview be used?

In 2011, the North Dakota Legislature enacted Senate Bill 2043, which required DHHS, in cooperation with service providers, to develop a new payment system using the SIS for individuals aged 16 and older. The SIS-A will identify the support needs of individuals, providing individualized service rates and identifies the number of staffing hours a person qualifies for per day.

## How can I give feedback about my experience?

At the end of the interview, the interviewer will complete a protocol checklist with all respondents. The interviewer will provide each respondent with a satisfaction survey. The Rushmore Group reviews all protocol checklists and satisfaction surveys and shares those findings with DHHS.

## Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the SIS-A interview?

Please contact John New. He is Rushmore's Project Manager and is available by email at: [john.new@rushmore-group.com](mailto:john.new@rushmore-group.com) or by calling 605.224.8899.

## Who should I contact if I have questions regarding DHHS' reimbursement system?

Please submit an email inquiry to [dhsddreq@nd.gov](mailto:dhsddreq@nd.gov) or call 701.328.8930. Additional information is available by going to the DD Section's website: [Information for DD Licensed Providers | Health and Human Services North Dakota](#)

## Where can I find additional information about the SIS-A?

Additional information on the SIS-A and resources for qualified responders can be obtained by going to the following websites: [www.aaid.org/sis](http://www.aaid.org/sis).  
[SIS-A, 2nd Edition Respondent Resources \(aaid.org\)](http://www.aaid.org)

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