



Position Paper

Introduction

The need for Services for people with developmental disabilities continues to increase while at the same time resources to keep up with the demand is becoming more and more challenging. In 2022 the Kaiser Family Foundation determined that there are 589,940 people across the United States who are on a waiting list for services. South Carolina along with four other states made up 85% of the people on the national waiting list for services. At the same time, we are experiencing an unprecedented workforce shortage. The Bureau of Labor Statistics employment report from 2016 estimates that there will be a shortfall in direct care workers of 7.8 million by 2026. In a 2024 report by United Cerebral Palsy and ANCOR turnover rates for DSP's continue to remain around 45%. We also know the cost of services continues to increase as does the demand. In other words, the status quo in the way services continue to be delivered is not sustainable.

Emerging best practice approaches for people with developmental disabilities have identified enabling technology as a promising practice to build service capacity, address work force issues, and moderate increasing costs. What is often referred to as the "Technology First" movement started in 2004 with the first Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) funded technology services funded in 2011. Currently there are 28 States that have adopted a technology first approach with some promising results. In addition, we have seen an increase of (HCBS) Waiver Amendments incorporating enabling technology throughout the country. It is evident the landscape of HCBS wavier services is evolving rapidly, with technology playing an increasingly crucial role in enhancing the quality of care and improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. This position paper from the South Carolina Human Services Providers Association (SCHSPA) which represents 55 providers in South Carolina contracted to provide HCBS services strongly urges South Carolina to support a Technology First Initiative by supporting the implementation of necessary action steps that promote the use of technology-based solutions.

What is Technology First?

Technology First is an approach that encourages the inclusion of technology as a natural support for people with disabilities. Dr. Shea Tanis from the Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities provides a more concise description of Technology First when she says:

Technology First is a "framework for systems change where technology is considered first in the discussion of support options available to individuals and families through person-centered approaches to promote meaningful participation, social, inclusion, self – determination and quality of life."

In other words, the technology first framework encourages the use of enabling technology to provide safe and appropriate support that is flexible, individualized and empowers greater independence. Utilizing such an approach can also help build service capacity, reduce dependency on staffed support as the only option, and is cost effective.

Current HCBS Waiver Framework

HCBS waivers allow states to provide long-term care services in home and community settings rather than institutional environments. These waivers offer flexibility to states in tailoring services to meet the needs of specific target groups, such as the elderly or individuals with intellectual disabilities. However, In South Carolina,

the current definition of Assistive Tech is extremely narrow and does not include enabling technology and its broad appeal for service innovation.

The Case for Enabling technology

Recent developments have highlighted the importance of technology in HCBS:

1. **COVID-19 Response:** The pandemic necessitated the adoption of remote technologies to ensure continuity of care. This proved to be effective and in many cases improved access to services for more people needing services
2. **Enhanced Service Delivery:** In States where Enabling Technology is being used, providers can increase service access, reduce costs and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of HCBS delivery.
3. **Promoting Independence:** Assistive technologies can increase autonomy for individuals with disabilities.
4. **Workforce:** Enabling technology has been effective in reducing the stress on staff, by providing alternative, safe and affordable support which does not always require direct, hands-on staff.

Action Steps needed to become a Technology First State

1. Legislation declaring South Carolina a Technology First State that lays out a clear definition, values and goals.
2. Modifying the current HCBS waiver to include Enabling Technology, remote support and other types of technologies as a service.
3. Modify and update directives, standards, and licensing regulations for HCBS waiver programs that reflect the inclusion of Enabling Technology.
4. Modify and add service definitions that explicitly incorporate Technology First language.
5. Set aside fiscal incentives for technology first programming.
6. Review and modify service rates to include hybrid rates that incorporate technology first and staffed support.
7. Establish marketing and communication strategies to educate stakeholders.

Benefits of becoming a Technology First State

- Increased independence and quality of life for beneficiaries
- Improved access to services, especially in rural areas
- Enhanced quality of care through real-time monitoring and data-driven interventions
- Cost savings through more efficient service delivery
- Increase in service capacity
- Effective and efficient use of staff time and resources.

Current Status

We believe strongly that as a State, we need to work towards becoming a Technology First State. Several initiatives have already been taken by our provider association to move towards that goal. These include:

- The development and implementation of a taskforce comprised of representatives from SCDHHS, SCDDSN, providers, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders.
- The development of educational webinars for the provider network that will be offered to all providers on Technology First considerations.

- Through a grant with SCDDSN and funding through the SCHSPA, four providers will be selected to pilot the use of Enabling Technology.
- SCHSPA has identified and contracted a Subject Matter Expert to assist with introducing and supporting the development of a Technology First initiative.

Final Thoughts

It is evident that the demand for HCBS waiver services continues to increase and that the system as it currently exists is not sustainable. Enabling Technology in conjunction with existing HCBS services appears to be an effective solution that is currently being implemented throughout the country. We ask for your support in embracing enabling technology to drive capacity, innovation and service excellence.