

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES**

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November 4, 2021

TO: REGIONAL CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: PARTICIPANT CHOICE SPECIALISTS

The 2021 Budget Act included \$7.2 million to fund three-year limited term Participant Choice Specialists for each regional center. These positions are intended to be subject matter experts in regional center service options that increase consumer choice and control in participant-directed services and the Self-Determination Program (SDP), and shall not be case carrying.

Participant Choice Specialists should be fully dedicated to supporting regional center service coordinators, assisting consumers and families with timely transitions to SDP, and building regional center institutional knowledge regarding participant-directed service options, including SDP. Consistent with statute and regional center contract, it is the Department of Developmental Services' (Department) expectation that regional centers facilitate SDP-related information sharing (e.g., enrollment activity, barriers to enrollment, Department guidance, regional center best practices) between each regional center and the Department. The regional center may choose their Participant Choice Specialists to help accomplish this task. Participant Choice Specialists are intended to assist the regional center in carrying out certain responsibilities related to SDP and participant-directed service options. These include, but are not limited to:

1. Making accurate information available to regional center staff, consumers and families about all participant-directed service options, including state and federal regulations that determine allowable and non-allowable use of SDP funds.
2. Providing training to service coordinators, regional center staff involved in the fair hearing process and other regional center staff, as needed, about the principles of self-determination, how services are obtained through SDP and the rights of SDP participants. Training may be provided in conjunction with the local volunteer advisory committee. [Welfare and Institutions (W&I) Code section 4685.8(r)(9)]
3. Meeting SDP enrollment targets and benchmarks. [W&I Code section 4685.8(r)(1)]
4. Expanding awareness of participant-directed service options through efforts to identify concerns and barriers to enrollment, reduce identified barriers and by providing information and training to consumers, families and providers about participant-directed service options.

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5. Developing and implementing an outreach and training plan for diverse communities and obtaining input from stakeholders about the effectiveness of the outreach and training and other strategies. The plan shall encompass information about all participant-directed service options, including SDP. [W&I Code section 4685.8(r)(2)]
6. Completing additional review of participant budgets which exceed a specified threshold and using the information in aggregate to identify additional training, program guidance, and verification of compliance with state and federal requirements. [W&I Code section 4685.8(r)(5)]
7. Working with eligible consumers and their families to apply for Medi-Cal. [W&I Code section 4685.8(r)(4)]

Consumers, family members, or providers should contact their local regional center with questions regarding this program directive. Questions from regional centers may be sent to [sdp@dds.ca.gov](mailto:sdp@dds.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

*Original Signed by:*

BRIAN WINFIELD  
Chief Deputy Director

cc: Regional Center Administrators  
Regional Center Directors of Consumer Services  
Regional Center Community Services Directors  
Association of Regional Center Agencies  
Nancy Bargmann, Department of Developmental Services  
Maricris Acon, Department of Developmental Services  
Tim Travis, Department of Developmental Services  
Erica Reimer Snell, Department of Developmental Services