

**Department of Developmental Services
Proposed Trailer Bill Legislation
Fiscal Year 2026-27**

Equitable and Consistent Needs Assessment

Fact Sheet

1. Issue Title: Equitable and Consistent Needs Assessment

2. Background:

Standardizing Assessment Methods for Intake

To become eligible for Lanterman Act services, a regional center must determine that an individual has a “developmental disability” that is considered a “substantial disability.” Regional centers do not currently use a standardized method for assessing developmental disability or substantial disability, resulting in variability in intake processes across the state. Through the implementation of Chapter 192, Statutes of 2023 (Senate Bill 138), it has become clear that a critical part of the requirements to standardize intake is to specifically standardize the assessment practices for determining developmental disability and substantial disability. Standardization of these practices will improve consistency and equity in accessing the regional center system.

Modernizing Evaluation Tool for Service Provision

Regional centers currently use the Client Diagnostic and Evaluation Report (CDER) to record eligible individuals’ diagnoses and evaluate daily living skills. This informs the Individual Program Plan, outlining the services and supports to meet a person’s needs and achieve individualized outcomes. The CDER is not a standardized clinical tool, and while periodically updated to revise names of diagnoses, it has not been meaningfully updated since 1977 to reflect individuals’ developmental needs. As a result, the types and levels of services provided to eligible individuals may not align with actual developmental needs, limiting the ability to determine whether purchased services are addressing specific needs.

The developmental service system needs a modern, person-centered needs evaluation tool that supports decision-making for planning teams in identifying and obtaining services and supports that align with the identified needs of the person.

3. Justification for the change:

Standardizing Assessment Methods for Intake

Establishing standardized methods for determining whether an individual meets the criteria of “developmental disability” that constitutes a “substantial disability” is necessary for equity and consistency in the individual’s experience with, access to, and outcomes from, the intake process.

Modernizing Evaluation Tool for Service Provision

Evaluating needs and using that information to determine service provision is not a new process. However, the current process is inconsistent across the state. The current CDER tool contains outdated clinical terminology and criteria inconsistent with current clinical diagnostic evaluation criteria (e.g., DSM-IV, multi-axial diagnostic tree, and ICD-10), as well as deficit-based language that does not align with person-centered culture. It also includes inconsistent rating scale coding and values, creating confusion and fidelity concerns that make data difficult to analyze and interpret.

Modernizing the needs evaluation tool will strengthen alignment between evaluation and service provision, enabling the development of standard metrics, and improving the state's ability to monitor outcomes of service plans, treatments, services, and supports. The updated tool is intended to align service levels to specific service needs. Adoption of a new tool will support service provision standardization, increasing equity and consistency for the community's service experience.

4. Summary of Arguments in Support:

Standardizing Assessment Methods for Intake

- Creates consistency and equity in intake processes as well as individual and family experiences by standardizing methods and protocols for determining developmental disability and substantial disability.
- Makes the intake process more transparent and reduces confusion among individuals, families, and referring community partners.
- Creates standard protocols for clinicians and regional centers to create consistent clinical practices and operations.
- Increases equity in access to the regional center system.

Modernizing Evaluation Tool for Service Provision

- Provides a dynamic, holistic, person-centered and strengths-based tool to assess strengths and needs with people and their circle of support.
- Strengthens the new Individual Program Plan process and supports the goal of identifying and measuring the achievement of individual outcomes through service provision.
- Guides service provision with a tool that informs service plan goals and supports systemwide evaluation of how a service or support addresses needs.
- Increases equity in service access and provision by aligning services to actual, standardized metrics of need.
- Supports capacity development and data informed investments by enabling data and metrics on needs and strengths across all life domains.

BCP or Estimate Issue # and Title: 4300-050-BCP-2026-MR, Equitable and Consistent Needs Assessment