

Massachusetts' **SELF-DIRECTION** Program Response to COVID-19

Massachusetts was one of the first states where COVID-19 was detected in the United States, beginning in early February. Since then, Massachusetts has reported 114,786 COVID-19 cases and 8,617 related deaths as of August 2020.¹



Since the pandemic began, The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has seen a **growing interest in self-direction** throughout the state, including a **spike in enrollment** from March to June.

This includes new advocacy efforts from families who are looking for innovative ways for their loved ones to receive services and supports at home. Many of these advocacy efforts stem from the positive experiences families are having with their loved ones home while their traditional day programs are closed.

As the pandemic continues to present challenges across the state, interest in self-direction is anticipated to continue to grow.

During a recent State Program Member Open Forum with Applied Self-Direction, MA DDS shared the benefits of self-direction during the pandemic listed below.



Individuals having control of their supports allows them to select and hire staff.

This means individuals may hire staff from within their own circle, in some cases relatives within their own homes, which increases comfort regarding health and safety during the pandemic.



Supports for individuals who self-directed prior to the pandemic experienced less disruption than those who were receiving traditional supports.

As all Day Habilitation and Employment centers shut down, individuals utilizing those services had to find alternatives. Those self-directing day supports had fewer schedule adjustments.



Individuals who self-direct could pivot to remote supports more easily due to their ability to adjust the expectations of their employees.

This includes the ease of transitioning to remote support, as many were already utilizing FaceTime or Skype per the individual's request.



Self-direction provides individuals and families the ability to change their priorities of services and supports within their budgets.

During the pandemic individuals and families were able to shift funds and facilitate purchases for technology (tablets, laptops, smart phones) to enable remote support.

While DDS identified some program challenges, including how background checks are administered during stay-at-home orders, they are finding that individuals who self-direct are overall better prepared for managing their services and continuing to get the support they need during this pandemic.

¹ <https://www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-dashboard-august-18-2020/download>