



NCAPPS

Person-Centered Thinking, Planning, and Practice: Representative Examples of State Definitions

Prepared by Jane Lawrence for NCAPPS

September 2020



Introduction

The purpose of this document is to identify state- or agency-specific, clearly stated definitions of person-centered thinking, planning, or practice. The premise is that if an agency has a clear definition, shared internally and embraced by multiple stakeholders, the likelihood of person-centered practices being implemented would be increased. Thoughtful and consistent implementation of person-centered approaches can then result in positive outcomes for individuals receiving support, with increased opportunities for choice and meaningful participation in the community.

This document is one in a series of environmental scans to support National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems (NCAPPS) technical assistance and may serve as a useful tool for other human service agencies interested in enhancing person-centered thinking, planning, and practice. The 2019 NCAPPS resource [*Person-Centered Thinking, Planning, and Practice: A National Environmental Scan of Definitions and Principles*](#) includes definitions from federal agencies, such as the Administration for Community Living (ACL) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), as well as federal legislation, including the Affordable Care Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, and definitions used by other national organizations. In 2020, the National Quality Forum issued its [*Person-Centered Planning and Practice Final Report*](#) containing a definition developed by a multi-stakeholder committee of people with lived and professional experience in long-term services and supports across health and disability systems.

Although there are now a range of strong national definitions of person-centered thinking, planning, and practice, many state human service agencies find it important to develop their own local definitions for use in policy statements and implementation protocols. This environmental scan serves as a starting point for state, tribal, and territory human service agencies as they operationalize person-centered approaches in their local contexts. This document extends our national environmental scan and the work of the National Quality Forum by providing representative examples of definitions used by state human service agencies throughout the nation.

Method

This resource is an environmental scan of publicly available information from state agencies typically responsible for home and community-based services. The definitions selected were uncovered through internet searches for each state, using the terms “person-centered” or “person-centered planning.” Recognizing that state-specific definitions would be useful for a variety of stakeholders, including people with lived experience, we used popular consumer search sites such as Google and Yahoo to conduct the searches. Most of the definitions were available on the websites of state agencies responsible for administering long-term services and supports, such as the state Medicaid agency or the state’s Department of Human Services. In addition, the search function on each state’s website was used to identify other

resources and information. Some state websites included links to educational institutions, advocacy groups, and University Centers on Disabilities. There were a significant number of links to slide presentations focusing on person-centered thinking, planning, or practices. Many of these materials could be useful in developing definitions and implementation protocols; however, when there was no author, date, or other source information provided, they were not included in this document.

Themes

In reviewing definitions from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, a number of common themes emerged that are outlined here.

Revising Existing Policies to Emphasize Person-Centered Approaches

One approach a number of states have taken is to re-frame required service planning within the context of person-centered planning. In so doing, policy manuals and protocols reflected a substantive change from deficit-focused assessment and individual plans. A number of state policy manuals and implementation guidelines clearly reflect the core values and principles of person-centered thinking, including a focus on the person’s strengths, capabilities, and preferences. This is sometimes done by drawing a contrast between a traditional or *status quo* deficit-based orientation and a newer person-centered orientation. For example, the Alaska Division of Senior and Disabilities Services published the [Alaska Aging and Disability Resource Center \(ADRC\) Person Centered Intake Training Guide](#). Although this is primarily a technical document related to their intake process, the section “Introduction of Person-Centered Thinking and Goals” provides a succinct comparison of traditional planning and person-centered approaches.

However, in some instances, the term “person-centered” appeared to be simply replacing “individualized” in service planning guides and other policy statements. It is unclear if these states have also invested in training on the fundamentals of person-centered work, or if thoughtful consideration of the effort required to transform a system has occurred. Clearly, renaming service and program planning as “person-centered” does not guarantee that person-centered thinking and practices are being implemented.

Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Final Rule¹ Compliance

In several states, the revision of policy and procedure manuals was tied to the state agency’s efforts to comply with the HCBS Final Rule. State websites included links to presentations outlining the requirements of the rule, and an overview of person-centered planning was typically included. For example, [this presentation](#) from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources includes a definition of person-centered planning in its detailed description of the HCBS requirements. The presentation [“Nothing About Me, Without Me”](#) from the Kansas Department for

¹ - CFR 42 §441.301(c)(1) and CFR 42 §441.301(c)(2); <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/hcbs/downloads/final-rule-slides-01292014.pdf>

Aging and Disability Services highlights Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) guidelines, the role of care coordination, and integrates key characteristics of person-centered thinking and planning throughout. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration cites both state law and federal regulations in their [Person-Centered Planning Policy](#). Notably, leading with the HCBS Final Rule in overview documents and definitions risks placing an overemphasis on compliance rather than the principles of person-centered thinking, planning, and practice that underpin the HCBS Final Rule.

Adopting Established Approaches and Resources

Over the last 30 years, person-centered planning methodologies have evolved to guide conversations with people and families about their plans for the future. Commonly used planning approaches include definitions of person-centeredness or person-centered planning. In reviewing state definitions, the influence of well-established approaches was clear in the way several states defined person-centered thinking, planning, and practices. Some states specifically identified the resource that guided the development of their definitions; in other states, the influence was implicit, but just as clear to someone familiar with the approach.

For example, Michael Smull and Susan Burke-Harrison at the University of Maryland developed Essential Lifestyle Planning to guide planning for people moving out of institutional settings.² As this and other planning methods became more widely known, state agencies and community organizations looked to leaders in the movement for training and resources. Informal networks of leaders and practitioners shared their experiences as the body of knowledge around person-centered approaches grew. Today, [The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices](#) is a formal network of people who provide training and technical assistance on person-centered thinking and planning. The impact of their work was evident in reviewing state definitions. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services website includes a [video](#) of Michael Smull discussing the definitions of person-centered approaches. The [Oregon Department of Human Services](#) includes a link to The Learning Community on its website. The concepts of what is “important to” and “important for” a person, as well as planning tools such as the One Page Profile and Good Day/Bad Day, were frequently included in state training materials, policy manuals, and forms. Their influence was present in a number of state definitions, resources, and policies, even when no specific reference was made to The Learning Community.

[Charting the LifeCourse](#) is another approach to person-centered work that influenced several state’s definitions and planning resources. The LifeCourse framework is used to support the development of a person’s vision of a good life; it was developed at the Institute for Human Development at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in partnership with numerous stakeholders. Indiana has adopted Charting the

² From The Learning Community [website](#), accessed 8.30.20.

LifeCourse as the basis of its conceptual framework for the development of support plans. Their [Person-Centered Individualized Support \(PCISP\) Guide](#) includes a description of the life domains of the LifeCourse framework, and various elements of it are integrated into the protocols for case managers to develop support plans. [Hawaii](#) is another state that has incorporated the LifeCourse framework into their planning process for services for people with developmental disabilities.

Plain Language Resources

Several states provided information about person-centered planning using plain language and written in the second person; for example, Michigan's Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Administration developed "[How Person-Centered Planning Works for You.](#)" This resource uses a question and answer format and includes a glossary of terms used throughout the booklet. A search of the New Mexico Department of Health website resulted in a link to a similar [fact sheet](#) on person-centered planning.

Collaboration within States

In reviewing each state's available information on person-centered practices, an attempt was made to determine if similar definitions were used across disciplines within state agencies. For example, most definitions were identified in the context of planning for services for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Some examples were specific to behavioral health supports. Occasionally, the only result from the internet search was to a definition used in the state's educational system, often specific to transition planning for students with disabilities. Although evidence of coordination across state agencies was rare, there were a number of examples of states collaborating with other institutions or organizations to develop definitions, training, and other resources. The Center for Discovery, Integration and Transformation at [The University of Southern Mississippi](#) collaborated with the Mississippi Division of Medicaid on their Person-Centered Practice Initiative. The webpage of the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services that [defines person-centered planning](#) was based on a document developed by the Pennsylvania Self-Determination Consumer and Family Group and the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs. And a [fact sheet on Person Centered Planning](#) was developed by the Georgia Department of Education and Parent to Parent of Georgia.



Examples

As evidenced by the range of definitions identified, there is no single “correct” definition of person-centered thinking, planning, and practice. However, several key principles are common to most definitions, including a focus on the person, an understanding of the importance of choice and self-determination, and a commitment to full inclusion and access to the community. The examples included in this resource represent a variety of descriptions of person-centeredness, often including specific definitions included in state policy and procedures. The eleven states listed below offer a variety of approaches to providing a clear, consistent definition.

California

Department of Developmental Services

“Person-centered **individual program planning** assists persons with developmental disabilities and their families to build their capacities and capabilities. This planning effort is not a single event or meeting, but a series of discussions or interactions among a team of people including the person with a developmental disability, their family (when appropriate), regional center representative(s) and others. As part of the planning process, this team assists the individual in developing a description that includes: a preferred place to live, favorite people with whom to socialize, and preferred types of daily activities, including preferred jobs. This description is called a preferred future, and is based on the individual’s strengths, capabilities, preferences, lifestyle and cultural background. The planning team decides what needs to be done, by whom, when, and how, if the individual is to begin (or continue) working toward the preferred future. The document known as the Individual Program Plan (IPP) is a record of the decisions made by the planning team.”

Additional Resources

[California Department of Developmental Services: Individual Program Planning Resource Manual](#): “Person-centered planning . . . is an approach to determining, planning for, and working toward the preferred future of a person with developmental disabilities . . . and her or his family. The preferred future is what the person and family want to do in the future based on their strengths, capabilities, preferences, lifestyle and cultural background. Person-centered planning is a framework for planning and making decisions. It is not a collection of methods or procedures. Person-centered planning is based on an awareness of, and sensitivity to the lifestyle and cultural background of the consumer and family.”

This 283-page manual provides a variety of useful resources, including a discussion of values, personal stories, sample plans, planning format documents, and examples of person-centered planning approaches.

[California Department of Developmental Services: Person-Centered Planning—Building Partnerships and Supporting Choices](#): This 8-page document includes excerpts from the IPP Resource Manual and includes an overview of values, roles, and responsibilities. Dated July 1, 2001.

Connecticut

Department of Developmental Services

“What Is Person Centered Planning?” Person centered planning is an ongoing individual planning process that is designed to capture your dreams and desires and translate them into a plan of action. Person centered planning is a way to listen and take direction from you and the people who know you best. It focuses on your preferences, strengths and talents rather than your limitations. Person centered planning organizes and uses natural supports like family, friends and acquaintances and formal community supports and services to help you achieve the things that are important to you.”

Additional Resources

[Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services: Person-Centered Recovery Planning \(PCRP\)](#): This webpage includes links to a variety of resources that support person-centered recovery planning, including a workbook for individuals to use in preparation for their planning meeting, and a fact sheet for family members and supporters.

Florida

Agency for Persons with Disabilities

[Person-Centered Support Plan Instruction Manual](#): “Person-centered planning refers to a way of coordinating services that places the individual at the center of their support planning process. It differs from a traditional medical model which relies on assessments or input from professionals to describe the individual’s problems and what needs [to be] done to fix those problems. Person-centered planning starts with the individual’s preferences and goals and includes input from assessments performed by [a] professional to help plan for needed services and supports. Person-centered planning assists in identifying what is important to the individual, whereas assessments identify what is important for the individual. For example, being able to choose their morning routine or having access to a park may be important to the individual, whereas taking a needed medication is important for the individual.”

Additional Resources

[Florida Health Care Association](#): “Person-Centered Care (culture change) refers to the national movement for the transformation of older adult services, based on person-directed values and practices where the voices of elders and those working with them

are considered and respected. Core person-directed values are choice, dignity, respect, self-determination and purposeful living.”

Georgia

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

From [A Life in the Community Through Person-Centered Thinking](#): “What is person centered planning? Person-centered planning is about: listening to and learning about what people want from their lives; helping people to think about what they want now and in the future; family, friends, professionals and services working together with the person to make this happen.” This plain language document includes quotes from people and families, graphics and pictures.

Additional Resources

Parent to Parent of Georgia [Fact Sheet: Person Centered Planning](#): “What is Person-Centered Planning? Person-Centered Planning is a process used to help families, friends and others assist students with disabilities in preparing for their future. This process can help students share their own interests and dreams and develop a plan to turn them into reality.” Links to this resource are available in Arabic, Vietnamese, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese and Korean [on the Parent to Parent of Georgia website](#).

Illinois

Department of Human Services

[Person Centered Philosophy Statements](#): “Person Centered Planning can be described as the balance between what is important to a person and what is important for a person. It is a way to identify strengths, preferences, needs (both clinical and support needs) and desired outcomes of a person. ... **Discovery** is one component of Person Centered Planning. The Discovery process is designed to gather information in order to capture what is important to the person and what is important for the person. ... The **Personal Plan** is the single, integrated personal vision for a person's life. It focuses on the individual's strengths, preferences, needs and desires.”

Additional Resources

[Shifting to a Person-Centered System: Moving Toward Capabilities and Support](#). This webpage references information provided by Support Development Associates comparing current system characteristics and characteristics of a person-centered system. For example, the current system has a focus on identifying and fixing what is wrong, whereas a more person-centered system builds on existing and future capabilities.

Maryland

Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Administration

Exploration and Discovery for Development of the Person-Centered Plan: “Person-centered planning is a process that begins with the understanding that all people have the right to live, love, work, play and pursue their aspirations in their community. To that end, people have the right to figure out and pursue their good life. What defines a good life is as individual and unique as the person being supported. Many people also have family and others in their lives who play a meaningful role as the person explores potential interests and opportunities not considered before.” (page 3)

Massachusetts

Department of Developmental Services

“What are Person-Centered Practices?” Person-Centered Practices include both ‘person-centered thinking’ and ‘person-centered planning.’ To be person-centered means treating individuals with dignity and respect; building on their strengths and talents; helping people connect to their community and develop relationships; listening and acting on what the individual communicates; taking time to know and understand individuals and the things that make them unique. Person-centered thinking involves a deep respect for individuals and their equality. Person-centered planning involves a process and approach for determining, planning for and working toward what an individual with a disability or an older adult wants for his or her future.”

Minnesota

Department of Human Services

“What are Person-Centered Practices?” Person-centered practices are based on the fundamental principle that government and service providers must listen to people about what is important to them to create or maintain a life they enjoy in the community. When a person-centered approach is used, support and service planning is not driven by professional opinion or limited service options. Instead, planning looks at services and supports in the context of what it takes for a person to have the life they want. The person along with his/her support team identifies effective support and services that will help the person live, learn, work, and participate in preferred communities on his/her own terms. These practices encourage professionals to see people as unique and whole individuals with potential and gifts to share. Using these practices, professionals and informal support people learn what is important to each person and what contributes to each person's quality of life. “Person-centered” services are an alternative to “system-centered” or “professionally-driven” approaches.

“What is Person-Centered Planning?” Person-centered planning is learning through shared actions. People who facilitate the planning process will support a person and their team to go through a process and then produce documentation of their meetings and of the plan. However, planning is more than just making better paper, it’s about enhancing people’s lives. Plans evolve as people evolve, and as we learn through implementation.”

Additional Resources

Person-Centered, Informed Choice and Transition Protocol: “It cannot be over-stated that a person-centered system is based on a philosophy and approach to practice. It goes far beyond documentation in files or written plans. While documentation and written plans are tools for communicating important information and for accountability, they alone are not sufficient. The real proof of a person-centered system lies in the practices of those working in our systems and in the resulting quality of life of the people who are supported by our systems. At its heart, person-centered practices focus on each person, and the resulting plans will vary with each person, culture, and community. This protocol aims to provide guidance and accountability for person-centered practices without losing individualization through overly standardized requirements.”

New Mexico

Department of Health – Developmental Disabilities Supports Division

“Our mission is to effectively administer a system of person-centered community supports and services that promotes positive outcomes for all stakeholders with a primary focus on assisting individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to exercise their right to make choices, grow and contribute to their community.”

Service Planning and Budgets: “*Person-Centered Thinking* values and supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to make informed choices and exercise the same basic, civil and human rights as other citizens, including dignity of risk. Dignity of risk is defined as the right of individuals to choose to take some risk in engaging in life experiences. *Person-Centered Planning (PCP)* is an ongoing process that identifies what is important *to* and what is important for a person. The individual with intellectual and/or developmental disability (IDD) is at the center of the process and is encouraged to direct the process as much as possible. No matter what the nature or severity of a person’s disability, there are many ways to identify a person’s strengths, abilities, preferences, needs, and goals. ISP supports people with IDD to exercise the same basic legal, civil and human rights as well as other citizens. *Person-Centered Practice* is aligning services and resources to support individuals to achieve individual goals and outcomes that are important to and for them.”

Additional Resources

[Person Centeredness Fact Sheet](#): “Person-Centered Planning: A way to help a person plan their services and supports. It’s an ongoing process that identifies what is important to and what is important for a person. The individual is at the center of the process and is encouraged to direct the process as much as possible. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has requirements for person-centered service plans. Best practices for person-centered planning include: 1) Listening; 2) Empowering; 3) Encouraging; and 4) Supporting.”

[Person-Centered Planning and Home and Community-Based Services](#): “The person-centered plan is your plan, written in your words, and says what your goals, preferences, and interests are. You have the final say in what goes into the plan and have the right to have help from someone you choose when you are talking with people from the state about what you want in your plan. This is especially important when you are being asked to agree to something that may limit your right to make your own decisions about your life activities.” This is a plain-language overview of the planning process for HCBS.

Pennsylvania

Department of Human Services

“What is Person-Centered Planning? Person-centered planning can be used with all people including those with mental health issues and people with significant disabilities. It works for people of all ages, starting at birth and continuing throughout the life span. Person-centered planning also works with people of all abilities. ... Person-centered planning is a way for you to say what is important to you and what is important for you in your life. In addition, it helps you figure out how to make the things you want in your life happen. A plan can be as simple as you having some ideas that you tell other people. However, it helps if you write down these ideas or record them in some way. Having a plan that is used is more important than just writing a nice plan. Sometimes a formal planning process is used. Different tools and methods can be used depending upon your circumstances. Sometimes you might start a particular planning process and then it doesn't feel right. When this happens, you need to try another way.” The Pennsylvania DHS website notes that “this information was created as a pamphlet by a workgroup of the Pennsylvania Self Determination Consumer and Family Group and the Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs.”

Vermont

Agency of Human Services – Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living

“Person Centered Thinking: Person centered thinking is a set of principles and core competencies that is the foundation for person centered planning. Person

centered planning is a guided process for learning how someone wants to live at home, at work or in the community and developing a plan to help make it happen. Person centered thinking tools provide practical strategies for gathering meaningful information and facilitating conversations about goal setting, problem solving and action planning. This process ensures that focus remains on the perspectives of individuals affected by the issue or outcome. Person centered thinking also provides a framework for building effective relationships and opens the door to greater collaboration and planning in partnership. This in turn, increases the likelihood that the individual receiving services or the employee receiving supervision will be heard, valued and better equipped to attain the quality of life they seek at home and at work.”



Summary

Establishing a clear definition for person-centered thinking, planning, and practice is a fundamental first step for states moving toward transforming their systems. Clear and consistent communication among various state agencies is essential, especially with respect to expectations for person-centered services and supports. However, having exemplary definitions is not enough. The challenge is solidifying a shared understanding of what it means to be person-centered *based on the lived experience of the people receiving services*. The assertion “we are person-centered” should not be based on revisions to policies, forms, and manuals, but rather on the stories of people who are living the lives they have chosen, in communities where they experience belonging, and surrounded by people and friends who care about each other.

About NCAPPS

The National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems (NCAPPS) is an initiative from the Administration for Community Living and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to help States, Tribes, and Territories to implement person-centered practices. It is administered by the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) and overseen by a group of national experts with lived experience (people with personal, first-hand experience of using long-term services and supports).

NCAPPS partners with a host of national associations to deliver knowledgeable and targeted technical assistance.

You can find us at <https://ncapps.acl.gov>

This document is publicly available for use in the administration and improvement of supports for older adults and people with long-term service and support needs. All uses should acknowledge NCAPPS, and the developers of this content. Permission is required if the material is to be modified in any way or used in broad distribution.

Recommended Citation:

Lawrence, J. (2020). *Person-Centered Thinking, Planning, and Practice: Representative Examples of State Definitions*. Cambridge, MA: National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems.



NCAPPS