

What is Supported Decision-Making (SDM)?

- Supported Decision-Making (SDM) is a valuable alternative to guardianship that can work well for many older adults and people with disabilities.
- The Person chooses a Supporter to help them in areas they identify in their life—health, financial, mental health, daily living, safety needs (food, clothing, shelter), etc.
- The Person’s Supporter can help gather information needed for a decision, help the Person understand options and discuss choices, and help communicate the Person’s decision to others.
- The Person makes their own decisions; through SDM they can self-select and consult a network of trusted friends, family members, and professionals for assistance.

Valuable tool for older adults, people with disabilities, and families

- SDM is flexible. The Person self-selects more or fewer areas they want assistance with and who they want to support them as needs change over time.
 - *Older adults and people with disabilities retain abilities and decision-making capacity as they experience functional declines in other areas. SMD enables them to ask for support where they need it without giving up their right to make decisions in other areas of their life.*
 - *People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) continue to acquire new skills and decision-making capacity throughout their lives. SDM provides support as people make decisions and facilitates greater independence.*
 - *SDM does not require one individual to take on full Supporter responsibility. Multiple family members can be Supporters, increasing the breadth of the support network. Non-family members can be Supporters.*
- SDM provides a mechanism for family members and others who care about the Person to provide input and understand the Person’s wishes and final decision.

Why we need Supported Decision Making in the statutes

- SDM is a unique alternative to guardianship that retains the person's right to make all decisions and specify decisions in which they want others involved.¹
- To guarantee access and a recognized role in decision-making about the person families are forced to pursue options that restrict the individual's rights to make their own decisions².
- Statutory language is needed so that doctors, bankers, and other professionals know that the Person has given the Supporter consent to hear, receive, and discuss information, and that the SDM agreement satisfies statutory privacy or other requirements to release records to the Supporter.
- Standardized SDM agreements provide consistency that clearly communicates the Person is the final decision-maker, the role of the Supporter, and with what kinds of information and decisions the Supporter is assisting.

¹ Other alternatives to guardianship restrict the ability of the Person to make their own decisions. Powers of Attorney apply to distinct decision areas (health care, financials) and give decision making authority to another individual.

² Limited and full guardianships restrict or remove entirely the Person's right to make decisions and give the Guardian responsibility for making decisions on the person's behalf. Overly restrictive guardianships can limit the individual's independence, cost families and the court system, are difficult to change, and can result in over reliance on paid supports.