



Legislative Report

MnCHOICES random moment time study evaluation

Disability Services Division

January 2019

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I. Executive summary

This report provides information about the reimbursement to counties for the implementation of long-term services and supports assessments. Lead agencies (counties, tribal nations and managed-care organizations) are responsible for the administration of assessments to determine eligibility for long-term services and supports programs and to identify a person's needs. The report includes a summary of the previous payment methodology, the move to the random moment time study methodology in October 2013, an evaluation of the current operation of MnCHOICES, potential cost-drivers and conclusions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the random moment time study payment methodology.

History

DHS contracted with HCBS Strategies in 2009 to help us to develop a single, comprehensive assessment that would become MnCHOICES 1.0. HCBS Strategies also did an in-depth analysis of the most appropriate payment structure to reimburse lead agencies efficiently and effectively for their administration of the long-term services and supports assessment. HCBS Strategies conducted a pilot study and analyzed proposed fiscal impacts with information available at the time. The Legislature authorized the use of the random moment time study for reimbursement to counties and tribal nations to begin in October 2013. Because prior payment methodologies for assessments included both state and federal match, legislative authority was granted in Minn. Stat. §256B.0911, subd. 6(i) to provide state match for time study activities related to assessment activities.

Status

DHS has been in a continuous cycle of evaluation and process improvement since the launch of MnCHOICES 1.0. We have made progress in a number of areas including developing efficiencies, additional training and guidance to lead agencies and the development of the next iteration of the assessment, MnCHOICES 2.0.

Review of potential cost-drivers

Some of the observed increase in payments for long-term services and supports assessments resulted from the consolidation of several reimbursement methods and payments embedded in other program costs. We also consolidated many support activities, such as administrative tasks, into the time study codes for assessment and the initial support planning to prepare someone to access services or transition to a case manager. The data shows that assessors spend a significant amount of time on these activities. While many of those activities previously were included in the reimbursement to

counties for administrative activities through the random moment time study, they are now identified as an assessment activity and receive a state match for the federal reimbursement.

Conclusions

MnCHOICES supports a person-centered approach to assessment of needs and eligibility for long-term services and supports. DHS has developed efficiencies to policies and technology related to the assessment process. Counties vary in how they manage the work, and further efficiencies are attainable at the local level to assure effective workflows and improve assessment quality. Our redesign of the MnCHOICES assessment and support planning tool with MnCHOICES 2.0, anticipated in the second half of 2019, will address many of the issues identified, increase efficiencies and improve the experience for both the person being assessed and the assessor.

The random moment time study provides an effective and efficient means of reimbursing lead agencies for their administrative costs, including their cost administering long-term service and support assessments. Some of the reasons costs have increased include:

- DHS reimburses lead agencies for administrative functions necessary to complete the entire assessment and eligibility process. This increases the costs historically paid for long-term service and supports assessments
- State dollars cover the nonfederal share of assessment activities
- We had categorized some administrative functions as general administrative activity, without a state match to the federal reimbursement, but now reimburse them as assessment functions through the time study.

The department continues to improve overall management and operation of its time studies. Over the next year, we will analyze administrative activities associated with assessment functions, as well as best practices for efficient county management of the work.

II. Legislation

Minnesota Laws 2017, First Special Session, chapter 6, article 1, section 52 requires the Department of Human Services to submit a report on the following information:

Sec. 52. RANDOM MOMENT TIME STUDY EVALUATION REQUIRED.

The commissioner of human services shall implement administrative efficiencies and evaluate the random moment time study methodology for reimbursement of costs associated with county duties required under Minnesota Statutes, section 256B.0911. The evaluation must determine whether random moment is efficient and effective in supporting functions of assessment and support planning and the purpose under Minnesota Statutes, section 256B.0911, subdivision 1. The commissioner shall submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the house of representatives and senate committees with jurisdiction over health and human services by January 15, 2019.

III. Introduction

This report reviews the random moment time study methodology for reimbursement of costs associated with county functions relating to MnCHOICES assessment and support planning.

The report includes the following five sections:

- History and background: Overview of the past payment methodology and the decision to change from service payment to administrative payment
- MnCHOICES: Overview of lessons learned from implementation, policy, program and technical changes made to create efficiencies and development of the next iteration of MnCHOICES
- Review of February 2018 forecast on MnCHOICES and potential cost-drivers
- Social service time study and social service cost report: Evaluating operation of the social service time study and the social service cost report for accuracy, compliance and wording
- Conclusion: Whether the random moment time study is efficient and effective in supporting functions of assessment and support planning

IV. History and background

Since the early 1980s, Minnesota has provided various long-term services and supports to help people to live in the community. To gain access to these services, a person must have an assessment to identify his or her needs, determine eligibility and select the most appropriate services to meet the assessed needs. These assessments are administered by counties, tribal nations and managed-care organizations, commonly referred to as lead agencies.

In 2003, DHS determined it needed to improve the long-term services and supports assessment process, including eligibility determination and support plan development. DHS decided to overhaul the long-term services and supports assessment process for several reasons. One significant reason was to eliminate the need for multiple assessments for people to access appropriate supports and services. DHS developed the new assessment approach (which would become MnCHOICES 1.0) to address the following:

- The need for better access to assessment data for programmatic and budgetary decisions
- The shift to a more person-centered approach in assessment and support planning
- Increasing quality management and quality control needs
- Consistent and equal access to services and supports statewide
- Efficient and effectively managed programs and services

In 2007, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) published a new rule for case-management services. Among other things, the new rule required states to separate eligibility determination for services and supports and the approval or authorization of Medicaid services from other case management functions. Minnesota statute also called for separation of administrative activities from case management as a step toward choice in case managers. Since a major goal of MnCHOICES was a unified assessment approach, it was a timely opportunity to separate administrative functions, such as those related to eligibility determinations, from the service of case management.

In 2009, DHS contracted with HCBS Strategies to assist in the development of MnCHOICES. This tool consolidates three assessment tools: the developmental disabilities (DD) screening, long-term care consultation (LTCC) and personal care assistance (PCA) assessment. These three types of assessments are often referred to as legacy documents. HCBS Strategies also determined the best way to pay for the new assessment approach. At the conclusion of its analysis, HCBS Strategies, in conjunction with a workgroup composed of lead agency and DHS staff, made recommendations for payment of assessment activity with pros and cons listed for each recommendation. After a pilot program and examination of the recommendations, legislation was proposed to adapt the time studies (social service time study, local collaborative time study, social service administrative tribal time study and medicaid administrative tribal time study) to reimburse for assessment activities. In 2013, the

Legislature approved Minn. Stat. §256B.0911, subd. 6(i), which read, “The alternative payment methodology shall include the use of the appropriate time studies and the state financing of nonfederal share as part of the state’s medical assistance program.” DHS decided a unified approach to pay for assessment activities via the time studies was the best option to ensure fiscal and programmatic integrity. This approach would also create efficiencies while maintaining effectiveness.

Before consolidating the various payment methodologies into the time studies in SFY 2013, DHS tested the approach to determine whether lead agency staff could understand and differentiate between new activity codes related to long-term services and supports assessment activities and existing codes in the time studies. The pilot program also collected data to develop estimates of the fiscal impact of the switch to a unified payment methodology. HCBS Strategies developed a model that compared data from the pilot program test with historical data to determine the fiscal impact of the new payment methodology. More information on the pilot time study and the analysis completed by HCBS Strategies can be found in their report issued in November 2011. If you would like a copy of the 2011 MnCHOICES Time Study Pilot Report, email DHS.Mnchoices@state.mn.us.

A. Previous payment methodology

Before SFY 2013, the state paid for long-term services and supports assessment activities in several ways. Since 2013, the time study methodology covers all long-term services and supports assessments, whether administered through MnCHOICES or one of the legacy documents. The table below compares how activities were reported and paid for in SFY 2012 and 2016.

Table 1: Comparison of payment for long-term services and supports (LTSS) assessment activities in SFY 2012 and 2016

LTSS assessment activity	SFY 2012		SFY 2016
	Reimbursement method	Total payment	Reimbursement method
DD screenings and long-term care consultation (LTCC) for people younger than 65	15-minute unit	\$11.4 million	Time study
LTCC for people age 65+ not enrolled in a health plan, preadmission screenings* for all ages	Set allocation through nursing facilities	\$8.4 million	Time study

LTSS assessment activity	SFY 2012		SFY 2016
	Reimbursement method	Total payment	Reimbursement method
LTCC for people age 65+, enrolled in a health plan	Included in health plan capitation payments	Included in health plan capitation payments	Included in health plan capitation payments
PCA assessments	Paid per assessment	\$5.4 million	Time study**
Supporting activities, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation and follow-up communication with the person, referrals, documentation • Developing a support plan and consulting with other professionals • Documenting and coordinating service eligibility with financial eligibility • Supporting an assessor by preparing packets, entering screening documents, editing and updating person's information, etc. 	Supporting activities were reported and paid two ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reported within county administrative costs and reimbursed in accordance with other social service administrative costs • Eligible activities would have been billed as a case-management activity through the waivers or VA/DD targeted case management 	Most administrative reimbursements to counties are not forecast because they do not have a state share. DHS paid for activities billed as a case-management function as a service cost.	Time study

* Preadmission screenings are not included in the time study.

** In SFY2016, \$1.9 million continued to be billed through MMIS because they were performed by a contractor who does not participate in the time study.

B. Time study overview

Because long-term services and supports assessment activities determine eligibility for services and programs, they are considered a Medical Assistance administrative cost. Time studies are Minnesota's federally approved method of allocating local administrative costs to federal programs, including but not limited to Medical Assistance. DHS bases the allocation on a random moment sampling of social services and public health staff. Social service time study and local collaborative time study users receive emails surveying activities performed at a time specified in the email. Each person is required to match his or her activity at the time of the random moment with an activity code, some of which denote long-term services and supports assessment activities. The results provide a basis for estimating time spent in activities related to Medicaid, non-Medicaid and general administrative activities. Counties also provide aggregated quarterly cost data. DHS applies the percentages from the time study to the county's cost pool to allocate costs and determine administrative reimbursement. This method ensures that DHS claims the federal match appropriately.

V. MnCHOICES overview

A. Implementation of MnCHOICES

MnCHOICES is a large, multi-year, transformational effort for the state of Minnesota. MnCHOICES is a system wide adaptive change to create an electronic infrastructure that not only determines eligibility more efficiently and accurately, but also collects data to be used for ongoing planning and evaluation at the local and federal level. DHS has been in a continuous cycle of evaluation and process improvement since the launch of MnCHOICES 1.0 in 2013. This has resulted in efficiencies, additional training and guidance to counties, and the development of MnCHOICES 2.0. The MnCHOICES 2.0 redesign, planned for the second half of 2019, will incorporate the suggestions identified by lead agencies to make the process more responsive to people being assessed and more efficient for those conducting the assessments. This includes feedback from hundreds of assessors and other lead agency personnel given at regional meetings with lead agencies from August to October 2016.

When MnCHOICES launched with lead agencies in November 2013, there was a significant learning curve for all involved. Lead agencies had to move from completing assessments on paper to using a web-based application to complete assessments and support plans. Technology presented other complications as well. The technology of the MnCHOICES application is not always stable. For example, the application shares a server with other systems that experience intermittent down time without prior notice. As part of a process improvement, MnCHOICES 2.0 will be built on a different server and IT platform, resulting in increased stability.

Lead agencies across the state also differed in how they used MnCHOICES. DHS discovered this at the regional meetings held with lead agencies in fall 2016. DHS met with approximately 500 lead agency staff across the state to gather feedback on four areas of MnCHOICES work: technology, assessment and intake content, training and organizational structure. The information gathered in the statewide, regional focus groups became some of the key drivers in the redesign of MnCHOICES 2.0. It also helped DHS to provide technical assistance to counties about ways they can operate more efficiently. With the help of a consultant, DHS held a two-day work session at a larger county in spring 2018 to review processes and identify opportunities to find capacity. One of the significant findings of this business-process review was that some internal lead agency processes and procedures affected workflow and decreased capacity to complete assessments.

B. MnCHOICES efficiencies

DHS has worked to create efficiencies in the MnCHOICES assessment process for lead agencies and for people who receive assessments. The goal of this work is to streamline the assessment process to shorten assessment times and to reduce the number of required assessments, all while maintaining a person-centered process that:

- Reflects state and federal policy
- Supports informed choice
- Assures services are adjusted to a person's changing needs.

DHS has worked collaboratively with counties, as well as the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators, the Local Public Health Association, the Association of Minnesota Counties and the longstanding County-State Workgroup, to make the assessment process more efficient.

DHS has made or is making a number of policy and technical changes since the implementation of MnCHOICES:

Technical changes

- DHS has reduced the number of required questions in the assessment.
- DHS has reorganized the assessment to make interviews more conversational and to shorten face-to-face assessment times.
- DHS launched the electronic support plan, allowing for more efficient support planning. The MnCHOICES system automatically transfers information gathered from the assessment into the support plan, where it calculates service rates. Lead agencies report a time savings of 30 to 90 minutes per support plan.

Policy changes

- Extended the timeline for nursing facility assessments after an admission for people younger than 65. The previous timeline for an assessment was "within 40 days of admission." The assessment timeline has changed to within 80 days after admission. Because of the number of nursing facility visits that last fewer than 80 days, this change cut the number of nursing facility assessments statewide by about 14 percent (2016 data.)
- DHS changed the requirement to complete a face-to-face assessment within 30 days after a person is authorized to receive DD waiver services to require completion within 60 days. This is consistent with other waiver programs and allows time to complete support planning and authorize services.

- DHS now allows case managers to enter a guardianship status change into MMIS as an administrative action instead of requiring a face-to-face visit. Before this change, in state fiscal year 2017, lead agencies completed 806 face-to-face assessments because of a guardianship status change.
- DHS now allows lead agencies to complete assessment interviews by phone to update eligibility status when there are delays in starting DD waiver services for a person caused by external eligibility factors, such as timelines to apply for Medical Assistance.
- DHS no longer requires a face-to-face visit after a change in county of financial responsibility for the DD waiver. This change aligns with requirements for other long-term services and supports programs and services.

Training

- DHS has provided guidance to lead agencies in ways to conduct more effective assessment interviews by delivering quarterly trainings throughout 2018. Trainings will continue in 2019.

DHS has made progress in a number of areas, including policy and process changes, system changes and training for lead agency assessors. We will also incorporate all of the policy and technical changes we made in MnCHOICES 1.0 into the upcoming redesign of the assessment (known as MnCHOICES 2.0). The purpose of the redesign is to update the technical platform, focus assessment scope, integrate and standardize policy and consolidate duplicate or similar items that were maintained from the legacy documents to assure integrity in eligibility determinations through the original transition to MnCHOICES 1.0. Some of the guiding principles in the MNCHOICES 2.0 redesign are:

- Incorporate a person-centered approach to measures of need
- Prompt assessors to use a conversational interviewing process to learn about the person and gather assessment information
- Build a consistent framework of response options across all assessment domains
- Condense domains
- Redesign application queues and workflows to help the assessor to complete assessments
- Create a manual for assessors to provide definitions, practice support and questions that could be used to open a conversation during the assessment interview

C. Factors to consider regarding higher payments for assessment activities

A portion of the higher payments for long-term services and supports assessment activities shown in forecast documents stem from the consolidation of several reimbursement methods and payments that were embedded in other program costs. The long-term services and supports assessment process includes more than an interview with the person. It is an end-to-end process that includes significant time communicating with the person and preparing information for the interview on the front end, as well as:

- Coordinating with the case manager
- Consulting with other professionals about support planning
- Documenting eligibility
- Coordinating service with financial eligibility
- Making referrals throughout the process.

Assessors spend most of their time on these supporting activities.

These supporting activities are considered Medical Assistance administrative activities. DHS also consolidated them into the time study to ensure that federal match is claimed appropriately. In the past, some of these activities were considered case-management functions and may have been paid for accordingly. Others would have been reported as other county administrative expenses. Most county administrative costs reimbursed via the time studies do not have a state share. When DHS consolidated long-term services and supports assessment activities in the time study, the state continued to pay 100 percent of the non-federal share, consistent with past payments for assessments billed by unit. Reimbursing counties for the full cost of these reported activities, in combination with the demand for assessments and a new assessment tool, created both a need and incentive for counties to invest in this work.

Because DHS previously paid for individual assessments by unit, we can't accurately estimate the cost of supporting activities before the consolidation into time study or how they have changed. For example, while DHS considered some of these supporting functions case management activities, we cannot quantify the cost of shifting them to the assessment function. Payments for case-management have continued to increase since 2012, but so have the needs and expectations for it. Higher expectations for person-centered planning, serving people with more complex needs and adding new people to programs all tend to increase the time a case manager spends with a person.

VI. February 2018 forecast and potential cost-drivers

When the state completed the first fiscal analysis (fiscal note) for MnCHOICES, we assumed that because we were rolling several different types of assessment and screening activities (developmental disability screenings, PCA assessments, long-term services and supports, etc.) into one global instrument, the costs for MnCHOICES would be roughly the same as the combined costs of those individual assessments and screenings billed by unit. Because financing for individual assessments and screenings before MnCHOICES included a state match, the Legislature also authorized payment of the non-federal share for assessments with state funds. As MnCHOICES evolved and was further defined, it became clear that the assessment activities covered under the random moment time study included several activities that fell outside of the previous individual assessments/screenings and now included activities that had been reimbursed either through the time study as general administrative activity or as case-management under our 1915(b) waiver.

This resulted in the state matching Medicaid administrative activities that have, historically, not been matched by the state. This meant an increase in state spending. We also assumed our 1915(b) waiver costs would go down now that some of these activities were included under assessment activities. This has not happened.

Some counties reorganized/refinanced their staffs to maximize reimbursement for assessment activities and to cover costs, ranging from intake to initiation of case management. Some counties moved workers from public health to social services. These moves increased the number of people who perform administrative activities associated with assessments, thus increasing county reimbursement and state costs.

Below is a table from the DHS February 2018 forecast on assessments for long-term services and supports that demonstrates the recent funding for this program.

Table 2 Minnesota Medical Assistance program – MnCHOICES forecast funding table

Fiscal year	Total annual payments	Federal share	State share	County share	Notes
2014	\$54,201,707	\$27,100,853	\$27,100,853	0	MnCHOICES begins mid-year
2015	\$82,348,950	\$41,174,475	\$41,174,475	0	N/A
2016	\$114,236,425	\$57,118,212	\$57,118,212	0	N/A
2017	\$142,353,335	\$71,176,668	\$71,176,668	0	N/A
Projected 2018	\$147,556,374	\$73,778,187	\$62,195,012	\$11,583,175	County share implemented by the Legislature
Projected 2019	\$152,479,088	\$76,239,544	\$64,269,936	\$11,969,608	N/A
Projected 2020	\$152,479,088	\$76,239,544	\$62,440,187	\$13,799,357	N/A
Projected 2021	\$152,479,088	\$76,239,544	\$62,440,187	\$13,799,357	N/A

VII. Social Service time study and social service cost report

A. Time studies

DHS administers and operates several time studies to help state and local public entities to identify costs associated with the administration of several different federal programs. Public entities currently participating in DHS maintained time studies include: counties, tribal nations, school districts, Department of Corrections and the Minnesota Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities.

While there is variation amongst the methodologies used to identify and allocate costs to federal programs, the use of random moment time study methodology has become an industry standard in the public sector. We use the random moment time study methodology with two of our largest county time studies. Random moment time study is a federally approved, statistically valid sampling technique that produces accurate labor/time distribution results by determining what portion of a selected group of participants' workload is spent performing all work activities. The random moment time study method polls participants at random times over a given period (quarterly) and totals the results to determine work effort for the entire population of participating staff over that same period.

The use of random moment time study allows DHS to accurately document staff activities in reimbursable federal programs. We use random moment time study results to allocate expenditures and determine the appropriate claims under federal programs.

Table 3 DHS time study overview

Time study	Participants	Federal programs	Sampling frequency
Social service time study	Counties	MA and Title IV-E	Random moments
Local collaborative time study	Counties	MA and Title IV-E	Random moments
Income maintenance random moment study	Counties	MA, Title IV-E, child support, CHIP, refugee, SNAP and TANF	Random moments

Time study	Participants	Federal programs	Sampling frequency
Social Service Administrative Tribal Time Study	Tribal nations	MA and Title IV-E	Random moment day logs
Medicaid Administrative Tribal Time Study	Tribal nations	MA	Random moment day logs
White Earth Nation Eligibility Worker Time Study	Tribal nations	MA, Title IV-E, SNAP and TANF	100% time reporting
Minnesota ombudsman Medicaid administrative time study	Minnesota Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities	MA	100% time reporting

B. Progress

DHS has worked with several counties to improve DHS' overall management and operation of its time studies with an emphasis on execution and fiscal transparency. This work has resulted in:

- The accumulation of standardized baseline data to be used to inform long-term fiscal policy decisions and management. Findings to date include:
 - The percentage of missed/deleted random moments appears high across all time study groups.
 - The percentage of general administration random moments appears high across all time study groups perhaps suggesting participants are not properly trained to choose the right activity and may not understand the importance of the data.
 - The percentage of time spent on the specific programs/activities and the resulting reimbursement vary widely across counties.
- An acknowledgement that our activity code definitions need to be updated. Lead agencies use activity codes as part of the random moment and must choose them to reflect the activity that most closely approximates the work actually being performed at that time.
- We are considering improvements to the current web-based applications and system administration including:
 - Creating opportunities for random moments to be more closely aligned with varying work schedules so that random moment opportunities are less likely to be missed.
 - Allowing participants an extra day or two to complete their random moments to address the missed or deleted random moments.

- Partnering with the counties to identify training opportunities for staff.

This work will continue well into the next calendar year. We are committed to working with our partners to make our time studies as accurate, up-to-date and transparent as possible.

VIII. Conclusion

MnCHOICES supports a person-centered approach to assessment of needs and eligibility for long-term services and supports. It includes considerations of informal supports and community resources, which increases the service options available to the person. This ensures the right service at the right time. This significant change in how assessments are conducted has a steep learning curve. As a result, DHS has developed efficiencies to assessment policies and technology. Lead agencies also vary in how they manage the work. Further efficiencies are attainable at the local level to assure effective workflows and improve assessment quality. A redesign of the MnCHOICES assessment and support-planning tool with MnCHOICES 2.0 will address many of the identified issues, increase efficiencies and improve the experience for the person being assessed as well as assessor.

The random moment time study is an effective and efficient means of reimbursing lead agencies for their administrative costs, including costs associated with administering long-term service and support assessments. This federally approved method of allocating local administrative costs to programs, along with the submission of aggregated quarterly cost data, ensures that counties claim the reimbursement for administrative activities appropriately. This method allows for the differentiation of activities that are within the administrative functions of assessment separate from the service functions of case management. It provides reimbursement for the administrative functions necessary to complete the entire assessment and other administrative functions essential to the eligibility process, which increases costs associated with long-term service and supports assessments. Furthermore, policy allows for state dollars to cover the nonfederal share of MnCHOICES assessment activities identified via the time study, which carried over the historic use of state dollars for the nonfederal match of long-term service and support assessments. As a result, a percentage of administrative functions that had previously been reimbursed via the time study as general administrative activities, which included a federal match only, now are available for a federal and state match. This also adds to the increase in state spending.

The time study continues to be an effective and efficient means for reimbursing lead agencies for their costs associated with administering MnCHOICES assessments. The department is continuing its work to improve DHS' overall management and operation of its time studies. Over the next year, we will analyze administrative activities associated with assessment functions, as well as best practices for efficient county strategies to manage the work.