Frequently Asked Questions
About the Second Edition of the SIS-A

This list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) is intended to compliment the AAIDD June 2023 memo on the release of the second edition of the Supports Intensity Scale-Adult Version® (SIS-A®). A plain text summary of the memo is also available.

SIS-A Purpose

1. How does the SIS-A benefit people with IDD and their families?
The SIS-A provides a picture of the overall pattern, type, and intensity of the support needs of a person with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). This important information can be used in developing a person-centered support plan and targeting supports to where they are most needed by the person to have their best life.

2. How does the SIS-A benefit service providers and governmental entities?
Service providers and governmental entities can use aggregated SIS-A data to get an overall picture of the needs of the population they serve and to inform the development of strategies to best meet people's needs. The possible utility of SIS-A data to inform organizational and jurisdictional decision-making was described in the tool's original 2004 manual and since then, numerous jurisdictions have transitioned to more equitable resource distribution strategies informed in part by their SIS-A data. In addition, current data can be used to inform planning to meet the future needs of those supported.

SIS-A interviews

3. Will these enhancements to the SIS-A increase the time it takes to do the assessment?
No. The time needed to complete the assessment is not affected by the enhancements.

4. Will respondent's interview experience be about the same with the second edition of the SIS-A?
Yes. While interviews will flow more smoothly and efficiently with the second edition, the areas assessed are consistent between the editions. AAIDD expects that improved flow and efficiency will result in an improved interview experience for respondents.

5. Does extending the norms to people up to age 84 change how the SIS-A is conducted?
No. The SIS-A is a standardized assessment conducted using a uniform procedure to identify the unique support needs of the person being assessed. The norming sample for the second edition of the SIS-A included adults with IDD aged 16–84, but the SIS-A assessment procedures does not change.

It is important to assess a person's support needs for each life activity in the SIS-A, even those life activities for which the person or their culture, family, community, or age group may not place a lot of importance. Certain items in the SIS-A may not seem be particularly relevant for every person being assessed, but completing all items in the assessment is essential. Comparison of a person's complete assessment with the norming sample of other complete assessments is the foundation for standard scores. Standard scores cannot be produced if any item on the standardized portion of the scale is skipped.

6. Are virtual SIS-A assessments as reliable and valid as in-person assessments?
Yes, virtual SIS-A assessments are reliable and valid assessments. A research brief is available on AAIDD's website that describes an analysis of data from virtual and in-person assessments. Its findings show that the two interview formats produce results of equivalent reliability and validity.

7. Should respondents be concerned about which edition of the SIS-A is used in an assessment?
No. Both editions of the SIS-A accurately measure the support needs of adults with IDD. AAIDD will work with each state or jurisdiction to transition their systems to use the second edition. The current SIS-A and SISOnline will be supported for approximately 18 months following the release of the second edition in early 2023. AAIDD will maintain two editions of the SIS-A and SISOnline until mid-2024 or until all jurisdictions have transitioned, whichever comes first.

8. Can participants review the SIS-A Interview and Profile form in advance of the assessment?
No. The SIS-A standardized assessment protocol does not allow the items to be provided in advance. Providing advanced access to the items will not result in a valid assessment. around the world). AAIDD provides resources on its website to support families and respondents to prepare for the SIS-A Interview.

9. What resources are available to assist families to prepare for the SIS-A interview?
To help families and self-advocates prepare for their scheduled assessment, AAIDD provides resources that support respondents' understanding of the interview process and the summary report on its website.

SIS-A Scores

10. In general, how much will a person's standard scores change when shifting from the current to the new norms?
For most people, the difference in their standard scores using the old and new norms will be minimal. However, for some people, the difference in standard scores will be notable, even if the types of supports they need on a daily basis and their raw scores have not changed. Their standard scores may go up or down because their support needs are being compared with those of a different sample of peers than they were before and because of the inclusion of an additional scale that contributes to the composite Support Needs Index (SNI) score.

11. How will a change in a standard score translate into funding or service changes?
AAIDD's focus is on the valid and reliable assessment of the individual support needs of adults with IDD using the SIS-A. Strategies to apply assessment results in individual budget allocations or to assign rate reimbursement tiers for service levels are developed independently by each jurisdiction or governing entity. Jurisdictional or governing entities are encouraged to analyze their own data to determine the extent to which changing scores (if any) might affect their approaches to allocating resources.

Enhancements to the SIS-A Assessment

12. What are the major benefits of the enhancements to the second edition of the SIS-A?
The changes for the second edition of the SIS-A have several benefits for stakeholders:

- New norms ensure that that a person's scores remain meaningful in comparison to today's population rather than with people from over 20 years ago.

- New items added to the exceptional support needs section will provide finer distinctions in support need and ensure that important support needs are not overlooked.

- The supplemental *Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Activities* scale is renamed *Advocacy Activities* scale to better reflect the agency of the individual assessed.

- The *Advocacy Activities* scale is incorporated into the SIS-A as a normed scale which broadens the understanding of a person's overall support needs and identifies the supports a person with IDD needs to advocate for themselves.

- Data analysis confirms that the SIS-A remains a valid assessment of support needs among adults with IDD up to age 84.

- The *Employment Activities* scale is renamed *Work Activities* to clarify that its focus is on support needed to engage in meaningful work activities across the adulthood and is applicable to older adults who may have retired from the workforce.

- The reorganization of some sections, scales, and items makes the interview more efficient and flow more smoothly.

- Minor edits in the wording and phrasing of headings and item descriptions provide greater clarity for users.

13. Do these enhancements change the normed items in the SIS-A?
No. These edits have no impact on how any of the normed items themselves are worded, described, or scored.

14. Does changing the order of scales or items with a scale affect the validity of the SIS-A?
No. Each scale in the SIS-A focuses on one life activity area. While interviewers must conduct the assessment one scale at a time, the order in which the scales—or the items within a scale-- are conducted does not affect the validity of the SIS-A.

15. Do these enhancements make any sections of the SIS-A optional?
No. All sections of the SIS-A are required. The SIS-A is a standardized assessment conducted using a uniform procedure to identify the unique support needs of the person being assessed.

In standardized assessment items cannot be skipped. During the SIS-A respondents are asked to envision the type, frequency, and daily support time a person would need for various life activities. The items cannot be skipped just because the person does not regularly engage in a particular activity (and may have no intention of becoming regularly engaged) in the activity. The SIS-A examines the pattern and intensity of the individual's support needs. An individual support plan addresses the supports provided to help the person achieve their personal goals.

16. Why is the *P&A* scale being incorporated into the SNI, and why is the name of the scale changing?
The supplemental *P&A* scale did not contribute to the SNI in the first edition because it was not normed. Today, not only are norming data available, but analysis confirms that this scale measures people's support needs in a valid and reliable way and contributes unique information to the overall SNI score. The scale is renamed the *Advocacy Activities* scale to better reflect the agency of the individual assessed.

Training and Materials

17. Have these updates changed AAIDD's SIS-A training or quality-assurance activities?
AAIDD is constantly updating and improving its training and quality-assurance activities. With the release of the second edition of the SIS-A , AAIDD has updated its training and quality-assurance activities to address the contents of the assessment.

18. Is there an updated User's Manual and Interview Profile Form?
Yes. The second edition of the SIS-A consists of both print and electronic materials that reflect the enhancements described in the June 2023 memo. With the January 2023 release of the second edition, AAIDD plans to continue to support the current (first edition) SIS-A assessment and SISOnline for approximately 18 months and will assist users in transitioning to the new SISOnline during that period.

18. Is there an updated SISOnline?
Yes. An updated version of the SISOnline was launched along with the second edition of the SIS-A. This version of the SISOnline will calculate standard scores and generate reports that reflect the new norms.

AAIDD plans to continue to support the current (first edition) SIS-A assessment and SISOnline for approximately 18 months after the release of the second edition and will assist users in transitioning to the new SISOnline during that period. During this 18-month period, AAIDD will maintain two versions of the SISOnline so users can continue to use the SIS-A's current norms as they prepare to transition to the second edition.

Norming

19. Why was the SIS-A re-normed?
All standardized norm-referenced assessments must be periodically re-normed to make sure that a person's scores are compared against those of a group of their present-day peers. It is simply time for the SIS-A to be re-normed, as it was originally normed on a sample from over 20 years ago.

20. Did the decision to re-norm the SIS-A have anything to do with virtual assessments?
No, the decision to re-norm was made and the analysis begun before the start of the pandemic. The use of the virtual interview format began after the start of the pandemic.

21. Does updating the norms mean that the current norms are wrong or that the assessment is no longer valid?
No. The SIS-A and its current norms still provide a valid means to measure support needs, but norms lose precision over time, so they must be updated periodically. The updated norms allow a meaningful comparison between a person and the IDD population of today. Re-norming is an important part of keeping an assessment current, and currency is important to maintaining construct validity.

22. What is norming (or re-norming)?
Norming is the process of collecting a representative sample of a target population's support needs, determining the range and average support needs of the sample, and creating a way to compare a single person's support needs against those of the sample.

Norming helps us understand a person's support needs in comparison with those of others who are similar to them. For example, a third grader's math achievement is reported as a percentile when it is compared to the math skills of other third grade students. Periodically, the norming process must be repeated with new samples to make sure that assessments continue to compare a person's scores against those of their peers today and not against those of an earlier generation.

23. How was the SIS-A re-normed?
Data from a large sample of actual SIS-A assessments conducted by trained assessors between 2017 and 2020 were analyzed. The sample consisted of over 100,000 assessment records of people with IDD from 19 states or jurisdictions. This sample included assessment data of people with IDD who participated in HCBS waiver services. In accordance with best practices in psychological testing and measurement, sophisticated statistical techniques associated with modern test theory, factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and multivariate analysis were used to analyze data and develop the norms for the second edition of the SIS-A.

24. Did the re-norming sample include non-U.S. data or examine differences between jurisdictions?
No. AAIDD faced practical challenges in receiving and securing data for re-norming in a manner that would align with diverse international protocols for cyber security and privacy. The re-norming was performed using the aggregate dataset for the purpose of developing and demonstrating valid, reliable, and psychometrically-strong norms; no analyses were conducted that considered jurisdictional boundaries.

25. Does the SIS-A provide different norms for different age groups?
No. The SIS-A is an assessment designed for use with adults, and a single set of norms is used to generate standard scores for adults. In contrast, the Supports Intensity Scale-Children's Version® (SIS-C®) has norms for different age groups.

Acronyms

AAIDD	American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
HCBS	Home and Community Based Services
IDD	Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
P&A	Protection and Advocacy
SIS	Supports Intensity Scale
SIS-A	Supports Intensity Scale-Adult Version
SIS-C	Supports Intensity Scale-Children's Version
SISOnline	SIS online scoring platform
SNI	Support Needs Index