AccessAbility Supports Program Review

Executive Summary

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The AccessAbility Supports (AAS) Program is a key component of the array of services and supports available to Islanders with disabilities. Operating as an individualized funding model, the program provides flexibility to clients, their families, and support networks to get the supports they need to reach their full potential. The program provides funding to clients based on a comprehensive functional assessment in order to support them to obtain the supports needed to experience full and meaningful citizenship and participation in society. AccessAbility Supports Coordinators work closely with clients to assist them to manage the funding afforded to them, with a view to supporting them in their unique needs.

The AAS Program is meant to provide clients with access to supports not offered by the Government of Prince Edward Island through other departments and involves funding for both disability-specific supports as well as a form of income support, similar to practice in most other Canadian jurisdictions. In 2018, legislation governing the program was amended to expand the variety of diagnoses and substantial impairments for which the program provides support. Seven years on, this review has identified several opportunities to further strengthen the program and ensure it is meeting clients' needs as best as possible.

These recommendations were developed through extensive research alongside **in-depth client, service delivery partner, and community engagements**. The project team held four in-person community engagement sessions and two virtual engagement sessions, fostering direct conversations with 121 Islanders. The review also included 26 sessions with core-funded service delivery partners, received 270 responses to the review's public survey, and held 14 sessions with frontline staff and other government departments. The insights generated during these engagements – and others – have supported the development of this comprehensive suite of recommendations.

Application, eligibility, and assessment processes can be clarified and streamlined by key changes that include screening tools, clarifying the use of documents such as the Health Report, expanding the role of SDS assessors, and ensuring adequate assessment capacity within SDS. During the review, several

administrative inefficiencies were identified - such as the use of a committee to determine client eligibility for AAS. These inefficiencies can be addressed by deploying resources such as assessors more efficiently, including redesigning their role in eligibility determination for the program.

The AAS program currently supports both children and adults using the same set of policies, processes and tools. There is a substantial opportunity to offer more tailored supports by **splitting AAS into separate Child & Adult streams**, offering more personalized supports relative to the needs of Islanders with disabilities across various stages of life. The review identified further opportunities for increased efficiency and an improved client experience, such as making **portions of funding self-directed**, improving client agency and autonomy. . Finally, SDS should **increase the monthly respite funding cap** and seek opportunities to better collaborate across Departments to meet the needs of clients with complex support needs.

Given the mandate of the program and case management pressures, AAS does not presently support service coordination and planning support for ineligible individuals. Expanding the AAS program to include a **planning-only support option** for ineligible individuals with a disability would expand the program's reach and assist Islanders in identifying natural and community-based supports that can help them achieve full citizenship in society.

To better support program fidelity is recommended that SDS **review the sensitivity of the PEI InterRAI algorithm**. During the review, the project team noticed patterns in assessed support levels that suggest that the algorithm is not sufficiently capturing client needs: over-assessing support needs some while under-assessing others. A review of the algorithm is needed to ensure clients are receiving support appropriate to their functional ability and support needs.

The **funding ceilings** and structure associated with the program is generally appropriate to meet clients' needs but **could benefit from clarity and simplification.** There is an imperative for clearer communication of admissible and inadmissible expenses, and the Department could support this by making available lists of inadmissible expenses. Some clarity is also needed regarding which expenses should be paid from AAS files, as opposed to the residential services budget, for clients attending day programming: clients should only cover the costs associated with direct support needs.

Back-office process efficiencies can be realized by simplifying expense coding for staff. In addition, there is a need to recognize the complexities of family life by updating income thresholds and **simplifying the client contribution schedule.** In addition, it is recommended that SDS **exempt spousal income** from AAS client contributions, prioritizing individual agency and aligning with calls from advocates against gender-based violence. Recognizing the difficulty of finding qualified respite providers in Prince Edward Island, members of extended families should be eligible for respite payment.

Following the implementation of recommendations contained in this report, the project team recommends a **focused review of funding ceilings**. The goal of this focused review should be to right-size client expenditures such that 80% of clients should be able to have their needs met within funded ceilings, while recognizing that there will always be clients with specific or unique needs that require a more individualized approach.

Taken in sum, this suite of recommendations will help build on a strong program of individualized funding to support Islanders living with disabilities. They will align the program with clients' needs, better support clients and families, and ensure that the program can be delivered with administrative efficiency.