



PERSON  
CENTERED  
SERVICES

Reach Your Potential

# Multiple Diagnoses

## Mission

Connect people to the care, support and opportunities that maximize their quality of life.

## Vision

A community where all people lead fulfilling lives.

## Core Values

People, Integrity, and Trust



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# Agenda



What are we talking about?



Multiple Diagnoses in people with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities



Trends –Person Centered Services



Chicken or the egg?



Tips, resources, links, etc.



## Basic Terms (shared language/understanding)

Diagnosis= The art or act of identifying a disease from its signs and symptoms

Signs= what others see (observe), what we have observed about our selves (change in behavior/patterns)

Symptoms=what we experience (internally and physically)

Behavior= a functional occurrence or act, no different than a sign/symptom of mental and behavioral health issues

Types of diagnoses= medical, clinical, mental health, substance use disorders

Who can diagnose= depends on what is being diagnosed (doctor, psychologist, etc.)



# Understanding biases/myths

- People with developmental disabilities often exhibit aggression or self-injurious behavior
- People with developmental disabilities can't experience human emotions like you and me
- People with developmental disabilities don't develop depression, personality disorders, or other mental health disorders
- People with developmental disabilities can't feel oppressed by their dependence on others
- People with developmental disabilities can't benefit from mental health, behavioral health, or substance use treatment- medication is the only option
- People with developmental disabilities are just attention seeking and know better
- Since they are just "behavioral", we can "fix" bad behavior by punishment and consequences



# Multiple Diagnoses

- A better way to talk about dual diagnosis, co-morbidities
- A person can be diagnosed with more than one thing at a time
- A person can be diagnosed with both developmental disabilities and/or medical conditions and/or mental health conditions
- What we see in the people we support here at Person Centered Services:
  - 14 out of 256 (high utilizers) have one diagnosis (IDD)
  - 95% have more than one diagnosis, many have more than 3
  - What are some of the diagnoses you see in the people you support?



# What we know:

- People with developmental disabilities are likely to be diagnosed inaccurately/unnecessarily with some disorders- i.e. impulse control disorders, psychotic disorders, autism- why?
- People with developmental disorders are less likely to be diagnosed with some significant disorders that are actually present- i.e. trauma related disorders, anxiety. Depression- why?
- The complexity of signs/symptoms/behaviors may make it difficult to tease out underlying concerns- chicken or egg ??
- Always advocate for the ruling out of medical and physical complaints when another path is not clear



# Be aware of Overshadowing

- What is it? A phenomenon in which all signs, symptoms, or changes are attributed to a developmental disability or to a mental health disorder without due consideration of other possible causes
  - People with developmental disabilities, care givers, care coordinators, and advocates may experience overshadowing in different environments- schools, medical facilities, OPWDD services, non-OPWDD providers
- Why does this happen?
  - Lack of formal training
  - Bias, stereotypes
  - Tunnel vision
  - Lack of available information
  - Limited exposure to a specific group of people





# How does overshadowing harm the people we support?

- Person's needs and experiences are not taken seriously
- Can result in an inaccurate diagnosis and treatment
- Contribute to prolonged suffering and unnecessary strain on the person and their support system
- Perpetuates stigma and mistreatment of people with developmental disabilities



# How to reduce overshadowing

- Become aware and pay attention
- Accept that people with developmental disabilities experience the same mental and behavioral health concerns as those without developmental disabilities
- Understand that people with developmental disabilities can experience loneliness, low self-esteem, sadness, loss, rejection, disappointment, fear, trauma, and all the other human emotions that are difficult to cope with
- Advocate for accurate/thorough assessments/examinations to arrive at accurate diagnoses
- Understand that sometimes signs/symptoms of clinically relevant concerns may appear differently in people with developmental disabilities
- Understand that ALL behavior is a sign/symptom, serves a purpose, and/or is communicating something



# How to reduce overshadowing- cont.

- Provide professionals with neutral, detailed, and accurate (unbiased) information
- Pay attention to changes in the person's medications, environment, circumstances, behaviors, etc.
- Be conscientious of biases and myths and remind others of these biases and myths while advocating for the person you support



# How to support a person with multiple diagnoses...



# Key Takeaways

- Overshadowing may impact accurate diagnoses
- Accurate diagnosing can take time and many people
- Always rule out medical issues/concerns first if possible
- Do not get caught up in the chicken or egg thought process
- People with developmental disabilities should not be excluded from traditional talk therapy, group therapy, substance use treatment automatically- this is case by case and should be part of the person centered planning process



# Strategies

- Provide the person materials about their diagnoses in a manner that they can understand it
- Ensure that the diagnoses are addressed in the person's life plan and that treatments/medications are included
- Many psychiatric conditions are cyclical so tracking symptoms/signs, coping strategies, length of "episodes" is helpful information for the treatment team
- Do not downplay the impact that trauma can have on a person's overall health, specifically their mental health



# Resources

- Clinical Team
- Local Single Point of Access for Mental Health treatment
- Webinar: [Understanding Clinically Relevant Signs and Symptoms of MH-BH DD Slide Deck.pdf](#) OPWDD 10/13/2021
- National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)- each county has a chapter and resources for support groups, prorecovery activities, etc.



# Questions

