



# Clearing the Path: SMRT and County Collaboration to Overcome Case Backlogs

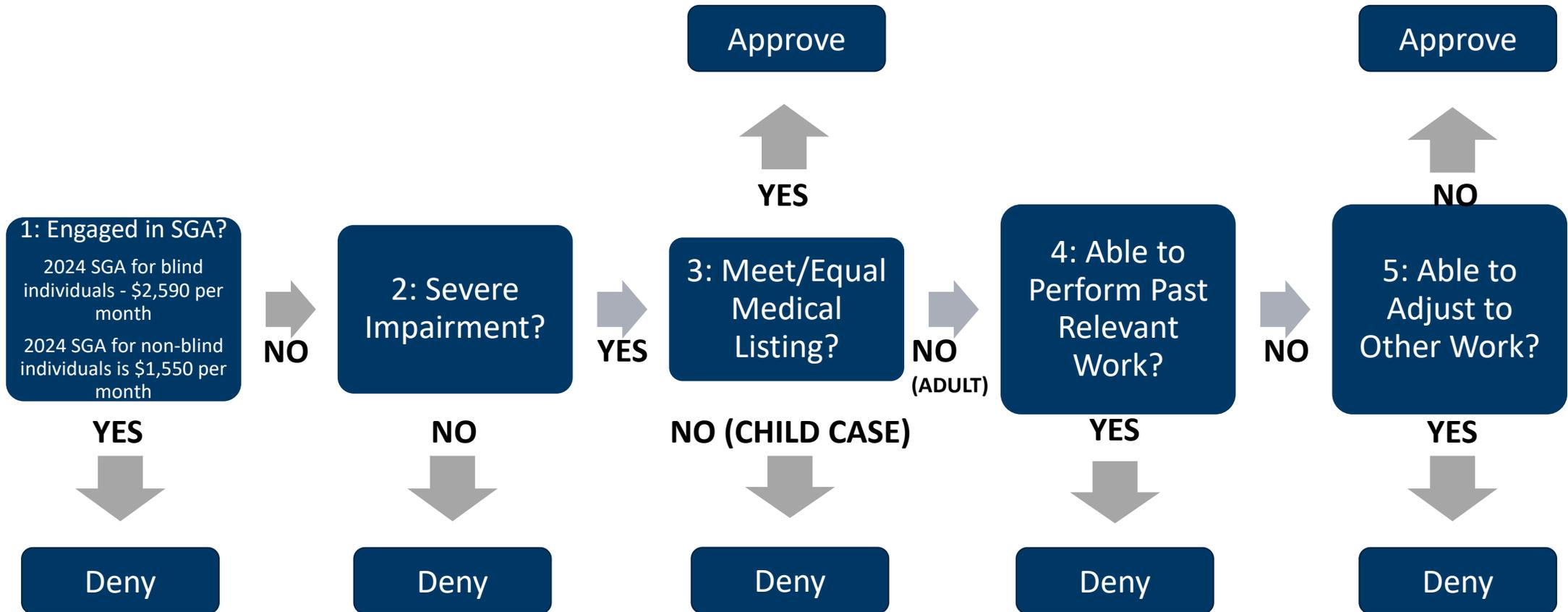
Carly Pederson | State Medical Review Team/HCEA

- Determining Disability and the SMRT Process
- Overview of Challenges
- How Do You Fit in?
- DHS LTSS: Business Process Review Recommendations
- SMRT 2024 Continuous Improvement Project and Future Plans
- Frequently Asked Questions

# Definition of Disability

- Adults: Inability to engage in substantial gainful activity by reason of medically determinable impairment that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or longer or result in death.
- Children: The child has a physical or mental condition (or combination of conditions) that very seriously limits their activities and has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or longer or result in death.

# The 5-Step Sequential Evaluation Process

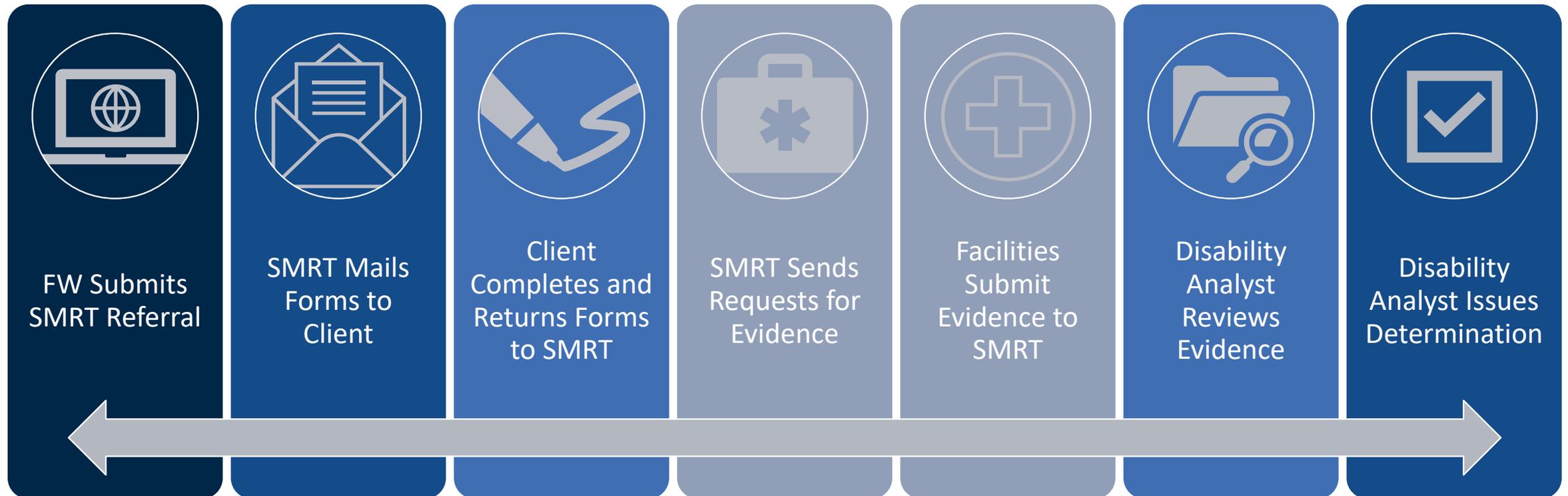


# Examples of Acceptable Medical Sources

- Licensed physicians and licensed physician assistants (within licensed scope of practice)
- Licensed Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) (within their licensed scope of practice)
- Qualified speech-language pathologists (SLPs) for speech or language impairments
- Licensed psychologists (at independent practice level)
- School psychologist for intellectual/learning disabilities
- LPCCs and LICSWs are NOT considered acceptable medical sources

The State Medical Review Team (SMRT) must follow the same rules as outlined in 20 CFR § 404.1502 and 20 CFR § 416.902 to ensure that disability determinations are consistent with federal standards. By requiring diagnoses from acceptable medical sources, SMRT upholds the reliability and accuracy of the medical evidence used in evaluating disability claims, aligning with the Social Security Administration's criteria and ensuring that benefits are appropriately granted to those who meet the legal definition of disability.

# The SMRT Process



# Expedited Case Referral Criteria

SMRT expedites case referrals under special circumstances. County financial workers must include the expedite reason when they submit the referral into ISDS. An expedited referral may be requested only if:

- A. The client is in a facility awaiting discharge and can be discharged immediately if Medical Assistance (MA) is approved. The facility must be listed on the referral; or
- B. The client is in a potentially life-threatening situation and requires immediate treatment or medication; or
- C. The client has a condition listed on the Social Security Administration's [Compassionate Allowance List \(CAL\) \(POMS: DI 23022.080\)](#) and this condition is listed on the referral; or
- D. There is a county error that may jeopardize a client's benefits. The circumstance is reviewed and accepted on a case-by-case basis.

**Clients can be approved immediately, before all medical evidence is received, if the application supports a diagnosis that would have a very high likelihood of certification (i.e., Down syndrome, metastatic cancer, ALS).**

- Supportive evidence must be received within 6 months of the application, or the case can be denied.
- SMRT must receive a signed authorization to release protected health information before a presumptive finding of disability can be made.

# Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs)

- SMRT performs continuing disability reviews (CDRs) every 1-7 years.
- The certification period is determined based on the likelihood of medical improvement and the program type.
- SMRT applies the medical improvement review standard in determining whether an individual's certification should continue.
- As of 11/1/2021, lead agencies are responsible for submitting referrals for CDRs when they are needed.

# Age 18 Disability Redetermination

**If a client is found to be disabled as a child, SMRT must complete a new assessment when they turn 18 for continued disability status.**

- Disability criteria changes once a person turns 18.
- As of 11/1/2021, lead agencies are responsible for submitting age 18 redetermination referrals.
- An age 18 redetermination is a new referral, not a CDR.

# SMRT's "Reasonable Effort" Policy for Unresponsive Clients

## **Ensures a uniform and consistent process for disability determinations.**

- Clients who do not respond receive a Withdrawal Notice.
- County Partners are notified and should review the case without the disability basis of eligibility.
- Appeals for these cases are directed to the lead agency for follow-up.

# SMRT Appeals

- There is a 30-day deadline to appeal SMRT denials, which can be up to 90 days with “Good Cause.”
- Hearings are held before a Human Services Judge to appeal the decision of a SMRT Disability Analyst.
- Clients have the opportunity to supply any new evidence and testify to limitations. They may bring additional people to the hearing to testify on their behalf.
- SMRT will submit a pre-hearing brief that outlines the theory of the case and will include all evidence used to determine the case. SMRT may or may not appear at the hearing.

# Overview of Challenges

## **Client Confusion:**

- Clients often confused about SMRT's role and required information.

## **Withdrawals and Incomplete Referrals:**

- Almost 12% of FY 2023 decisions were withdrawals due to various reasons, including prior SSA certification or residency changes.
- Reports of unnecessary referrals and numerous incomplete referrals with inaccurate or missing information.
- Incomplete referrals cause delays, data breaches, or safety risks.
- Average wait time for incomplete cases is an additional 15 weeks.

## **Denial Rates:**

- Denials issued are trending up as lead agencies are reviewing for MA under all basis.

# Overview of Challenges Continued..

## **External Factors:**

- Medical Record Delays
- Provider Evaluation Delays (Autism Evals)
- Client delays (Forms)
- Referral Delays (CFR issues and Holding referrals)
- Each lead agency with their own independent policies, procedures and post SMRT certification follow-up

# Analysis of SMRT Decisions and Impact of MnCHOICES Assessment

## Previous Data (7/1/2018 – 6/30/2019):

- Total Decisions: **6,348**
- Referred for Waiver Program: **3,262 (51%)**
- Certified as Disabled: **2,650 (81%)**
- Opened to Program Requiring Disability Certification: **1,730 (65%)**
- **35% did not open to a program requiring SMRT certification**

## Recent Data (12/1/2021 – 11/30/2022):

- Total Decisions: **8,069**
- Referred for Waiver Program: **5,151 (64%)**
- Certified as Disabled: **3,962 (77%)**
- Opened to Program Requiring Disability Certification: **2,907 (73%)**
- **27% did not open to a program requiring SMRT certification**

## Takeaway:

### • Increase in Program Enrollment:

- FY 2019: **65%** certified clients opened to a required program.
- FY 2022: **73%** certified clients opened to a required program.

• **Conclusion:** Requiring the MnCHOICES Assessment positively impacted client enrollment in programs needing SMRT certification.

# SMRT Annual Growth

Annual Referral Growth by State Fiscal Year



- SFY 22 to SFY 23: 10% increase
- SFY 23 to SFY 24: **90%** increase
- Staffing Request

Bill	Actual
Covid unwinding	2
TEFRA	3
HC-67 (omnibus)	6
MA-EPD	2
<b>Original HC-67</b>	<b>Asked for 14FTE</b>

# SMRT Staffing SFY 2022-Current

SFY2022

SMRT Staffing

- 12 Disability Analysts (1 Expedite)
- 3 Disability Case Specialist
- 2 Leads
- 1 Appeals
- 2 Supervisors

**20 Staff total**

SFY2024 (43% increase)

SMRT Staffing

- 16 Disability Analysts (1 vacant)
- 5 Disability Case Specialist
- 3 County Liaisons (Expedites)
- 3 Leads
- 1 Appeals
- 3 Supervisors

**31 Staff total (when fully staffed)**

# What can delay a case decision?

- Paperwork is not received in a timely manner.
- There are delays between the request and the receipt of medical records.
- SMRT needs additional information but is unable to reach the client or the worker at the lead agency.
- Additional testing or examinations are needed to evaluate the case.

# When Should I Call SMRT?

## Reasons to call SMRT while a referral is pending:

- Program type or requested start date changes
- Address or phone number changes
- Name changes
- Foster care placement changes
- Client did not meet LOC on MnCHOICES
- Client decides they no longer want to pursue services and wants their referral withdrawn
- Client gets approved for Social Security Disability

# When Should I Call SMRT?

- Before submitting a CDR, carefully review and update ISDS to ensure client contact information (address, phone, AREP) is current.
- Reasons to call SMRT before submitting a CDR:
  - PMI changes or Duplicate client is found in ISDS
  - Client name changes
  - Changes to Authorized Representative
  - Adoption cases where ANY information changes (SMRT only needs to be notified of these changes when there is/will be an active SMRT referral)

# DHS LTSS: Business Process Review Recommendations

## September 2023

### Recommendation- **Update SMRT Technology**

- It is recommended that DHS upgrade from fax to an online platform with relevant workflow features. Agencies should be able to submit requests, send medical documentation, and monitor the determination status. The platform could also be used for follow-up, including the ability to notify the lead agency of what required information from individuals is still pending. Implementing an online system would eliminate the risks associated with a manual fax system as well as aid in remote work by allowing staff to submit requests without needing to be in the office.

<https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-8551-ENG>

# DHS LTSS: Business Process Review Recommendations

## September 2023

### SMRT's Response:

- The SMRT team has developed and deployed an online portal for lead agencies to submit forms and medical documentation directly to SMRT.
- We removed our fax line to medical providers, adding portal information to improve efficiency.
- Expanded read-only access to all lead agencies and tribal nations with a need to know.
- Opened up case notes and medical records for lead agencies to view current documents and pending items.
- ISDS is a live system, allowing lead agencies to instantly see issued decisions.
- SMRT hosts live, in person ISDS training monthly. (Trainlink- SMRT 301)
- ***FUTURE Enhancement- Client Portal***
- ***Future Enhancement- Electronic Access to Records***

# DHS LTSS: Business Process Review Recommendations

## September 2023

### Recommendation- **Coordinate with Lead Agencies on SMRT**

- **Streamline Signature Acquisition:** Improve the process for obtaining signatures on Releases of Information (ROIs) and required documentation.
- **Timing of MA Applications:** SMRT referrals can occur before, during, or after a MnCHOICES Assessment.
- **Expedited Determination Process:** Mark SMRT requests for expedited processing if assessments are imminent or completed.
- **Role of Assessors:** Assessors can aid the disability determination process by collecting required items during initial assessments.
- **Review Workflow Protocol:** DHS should review SMRT request workflows and follow-up steps for obtaining necessary ROIs and documentation.
- **Alternative Verification Strategies:** Explore new strategies for obtaining verification from medical providers and schools to reduce delays.
- **Acknowledge Assessor Workload:** Recognize the workload of assessors and consider involving case aides or clerical staff for support.
- **Use of ISDS:** Staff could review and upload existing documentation from the Integrated Service Delivery System to the SMRT portal.
- **Designate Appropriate Staff:** Agencies should assign tasks based on staff availability and workload, aligning with best practices of having a dedicated point person.

### SMRT Response

**Signature Acquisition:** To enhance the efficiency of obtaining signatures on Releases of Information (ROIs) and required documentation, SMRT is developing an online client portal. This portal will allow clients to complete an abbreviated version of the disability worksheet and electronically sign the ROI, which will streamline document submission and reduce delays.

**Expedited Determination Process:** Our expedited processing system focuses on the individual circumstances of each client rather than program type. This ensures that all clients receive timely decisions, particularly those in urgent situations, maintaining fairness across the board.

**Role of Assessors:** While assessors can assist in collecting required items during initial assessments, our new portal aims to alleviate their workload by streamlining the document collection process.

**Review Workflow Protocol:** We are in the early stages of a Greenbelt Continuous Improvement project to refine SMRT referrals and address any challenges related to obtaining ROIs and other documentation. This project will help review and improve our request workflows and follow-up steps.

**Alternative Verification Strategies:** We are working with MHA and other facilities to enhance electronic access and accept electronic signatures. This modernization effort includes exploring new strategies for obtaining verification from medical providers and schools to reduce delays.

# Enhancing SMRT Efficiency with Electronic Medical Records and Electronic Signature Acceptance

## Current Challenges

### **Medical Record Collection**

- Delays due to faxing/mailing/HIM resources
- Rejected ROIs that have been signed electronically

### **Impact on SMRT and clients served**

- Prolonged hospital stays, delayed SMRT decisions and resource strain

## Proposed Solution

### **Access to Electronic Medical Records**

- Streamline processes
- Enhance PHI protection
- Reduce workload for HIM and SMRT

### **Electronic Signature Acceptance**

- Build a client portal
- Simplify documentation processes

## Successful Collaborations

Partnerships with MHealth, Allina and North Memorial

### **Benefits**

- Faster Decision-Making
- Efficiency Improvement
- Error Reduction
- Enhanced Client Engagement
- Cost savings
- Improved Equity

# 2024 Continuous Improvement Project

## Greenbelt Project- Problem Statement:

The State Medical Review Team receives referrals from lead agencies for individuals who need disability determinations for healthcare eligibility. A large portion of referrals contain incomplete or inaccurate data or are unnecessary. Cases that require further follow up and development are delayed by an average of 16 weeks. Referrals that are unnecessary are withdrawn, which many times takes place after considerable work has been done on a case. These problems lead to significant delays in clients accessing needed services and supports and can result in increased hospitalizations, delayed discharge from hospitals and nursing homes, and lack of needed care.

# SMRT ISDS User Training

- SMRT hosts one training session monthly about the ISDS system for direct county or tribal employees who submit referrals or who need read-only access.
  - The “County Worker Role” is for county financial workers who submit SMRT referrals in ISDS.
  - The “Tribal Worker Role” is for tribal workers who submit SMRT referrals in ISDS.
  - The “Read Only Role” is for direct county employees with a need-to-know basis who are actively and routinely involved in SMRT cases.
- New users must attend one ISDS user training prior to gaining access.
- Completion of the state training is required once every 2 years.
- Register for this training on TrainLink in the Health Care Learning Center by searching for “SMRT301” in the course catalog.

# If You Help Clients With Forms

- New applicants must complete the DHS-6124 Authorization to Release Protected Health Information form and either the DHS-6125 (Adult Disability Worksheet) or DHS-6126 (Children's Disability Worksheet).
- The current versions of forms are linked on SMRT's website: [The State Medical Review Team \(SMRT\) / Minnesota Department of Human Services \(mn.gov\)](#).
- The DHS-6125 worksheet gives the Disability Analyst an overview of the client's medical conditions, how their conditions impair activities, and where they have treated for their conditions.
  - If the client had special education in school, please list the school district.
  - If the client receives Vocational Rehabilitation services, ARMHS, or therapy, please list these providers on the worksheet.

# Now Live– ISDS Provider Portal!

- The portal allows electronic document submission directly to SMRT’s ISDS system.
- The link was shared through a SIR announcement and will be shared through Disability Services Division (DSD) bulletin, included in SMRT 301 training found on TrainLink, and on the SMRT Webpage.
- The portal site can be accessed here: [DHS-8462-ENG \(State Medical Review Team \(SMRT\) Document Portal\) \(mn.gov\)](#)



# State Medical Review Team

## State Medical Review Team (SMRT)

PO Box 64248

St. Paul, MN 55164-0248

Phone: 651-431-2493 or 800-235-7396

Fax: 651-431-7457 or 800-311-3137

Visit the [SMRT Website](#) for links to our forms  
and more information



# Frequently Asked Questions

- Is it possible to start the SMRT process without a MnCHOICES Assessment?
  - When referring to SMRT for BI, CAC, CADI, or DD waivers, the client **should** have had a MnCHOICES Assessment within the 150 days prior to the SMRT referral or be scheduled for a MnCHOICES Assessment within 60 days after the referral.
- What should be done in situations where a less restrictive placement is needed (e.g., stepping down from PRTF or QRTP to a CADI waiver-funded group home)?
  - If the client is in a facility, is medically ready for discharge, and cannot discharge without SMRT for program eligibility, an Expedited SMRT review should be requested.
  - When requesting expedited processing by SMRT, the MnCHOICES Assessment must have already been completed or be scheduled to be completed within 15 business days of the SMRT request
  - Timelines for processing all SMRT referrals (including expedites) vary widely depending on many factors.

# Frequently Asked Questions

- Can a county social worker initiate the SMRT process for a child who already has MA coverage based on their placement?
  - Only Financial Workers can submit SMRT referrals in ISDS.
  - The Financial Workers are responsible for determining program eligibility. A SMRT determination is just one piece of eligibility.
- Can a county social worker send supporting documentation?
  - Yes! As soon as you have confirmed that a referral is pending in ISDS, you can submit any supporting documentation you have – SMRT forms, guardianship paperwork, medical records, school records, etc.
  - Link to SMRT Document Portal: <https://edocs.mn.gov/forms/DHS-8462-ENG>

# Frequently Asked Questions

- Does a social worker receive updates on the status of the SMRT determination, particularly when acting on behalf of the child who is a ward of the state?
  - SMRT faxes a copy of the decision letter to the county and mails a copy to the primary address on file for the client as well as their authorized representative.
  - All county and tribal workers who routinely request or submit SMRT referrals for their clients can obtain access to SMRT's ISDS Case Management System to monitor the status of their referrals.
    - To register for these trainings, go to the [Health Care Learning Center on TrainLink](#)

# Thank you!

Carly Pederson  
Unit Manager, State Medical Review Team (SMRT)  
Minnesota Department of Human Services  
P.O. Box 64248  
St Paul, MN, 55164-0248  
Office: 651-431-5657  
[Carly.Pederson@State.MN.US](mailto:Carly.Pederson@State.MN.US)