

WHAT WE HEARD

Fall 2024 Community Engagements Summary

AccessAbility Supports and Residential Services Review



About the review

The AccessAbility Supports (AAS) and Residential Services Programs are being reviewed to determine whether they are helping Islanders living with disabilities access the support they need to reach their full potential.

The AAS review focuses on the client experience, application and eligibility decisions, assessments, and funding. The Residential Services review includes a focus on residential funding models, supporting NGO partners, managing waitlists, inspections, monitoring, and Associate Families.

The engagements so far

More than 100 Islanders participated in Community Engagement Sessions in Montague, Summerside, Elmsdale, and Charlottetown in early October 2024, in addition to over 20 Islanders participating in our virtual engagement sessions. We are grateful for their time and insight.

These sessions focused on **client experience**, **application**, **eligibility**, and **assessments**, **funding**, and **residential options**. The insights from these sessions are organized in themes highlighted in the next pages of this report.

Next steps

All of the feedback from the engagement sessions will be used to guide the considerations in the review of AAS and Residential Services programs.

Client engagements provide crucial input in the review and will be integrated with additional research to inform the final report and recommendations, which will be released in Spring 2025.

“
Navigating the system is complex for people who don't have a lot of spare time.”

“
I struggled to access the program and understand what is covered.”

“
We shouldn't be trying to fit our lives into boxes.”

“
People want to live in community with great neighbours.”

If you have questions or concerns, contact us:

AASResidentialReview@gov.pe.ca

EMERGING THEMES:

A summary of what we heard in the community engagements



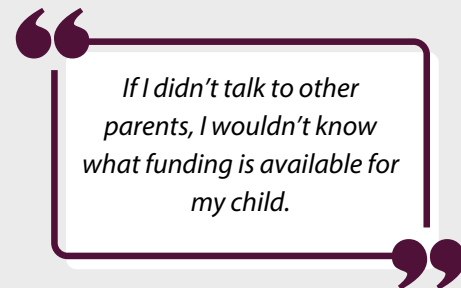
Program Experience

Staff and Program Administration

Many families and clients indicated that satisfaction with the program can be heavily dependent on support worker relationships. There was a mix of positive and negative feedback on staff interactions, including reports of effective advocacy and resource suggestions, high turnover, inconsistent instructions, and delayed communication. Many participants also felt that the AAS program primarily focused on funding management rather than comprehensive planning and cited a need identified for improved staff training, especially for the support of clients with complex needs.

Awareness and Access to Information

The feedback collected in the sessions highlighted the need for improved awareness of available services and funding within the program, as many families rely heavily on local NGOs for information and guidance on available resources. There was also a strong demand from participants for centralized, accessible program information and regular information sessions.



If I didn't talk to other parents, I wouldn't know what funding is available for my child.

Inter-departmental Coordination

Many participants cited gaps in communication between departments and system-wide staffing shortages affecting their experience with AAS and said their families were often forced to act as "go-betweens" across departments. Many also discussed the challenge of transitioning from school-age to adult services at age 18.

Ideas for the Future

What changes could AAS and Residential Services consider?



- Developing comprehensive, accessible service information
- Enhancing staff training and retention strategies
- Considering separate program stream for youth under 18

EMERGING THEMES:

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Applications, Eligibility, and Assessment

Assessment Processes

Across the engagement sessions, clients said there were mixed experiences with the application process. Many experienced long wait times due to Assessor shortages, with many also feeling that standardized assessment criteria failed to capture their complex, non-physical needs. Other concerns that were brought up during the engagements were focused on the barriers to accessing proper medical documentation, challenges with unclear questions and scales in the Health Report, and confusion around how the assessment captures their abilities and accompanying level of support.

Intake and Onboarding Experiences

A portion of clients found the intake process straightforward and easy to follow, but others did not, suggesting inconsistencies in how information is communicated. Experiences shared about the onboarding process were mixed. Many participants found the process straightforward and appreciated the supportive staff, but delays in the process were a common concern, with some clients facing onboarding periods that lasted several months.

Transparency and Communication

Several participants felt unsure about the assessments and re-assessment process. In some cases, participants found it challenging to understand their eligibility status or the reasons behind decisions. We heard that this uncertainty and lack of clarity around expectations creates additional stress.

I'm not clear on when re-assessments should occur.



Ideas for the Future

What changes could AAS and Residential Services consider?

- Streamlining the onboarding process
- Improving transparency around assessment decisions
- Creating user-friendly guides for navigation

EMERGING THEMES:

A summary of what we heard in the community engagements



Funding and Programs

Awareness and Funding Amounts

Many families shared that they struggle to navigate AAS funding, citing challenges in understanding the supports available. Several family members of clients reported limited contact with Support Coordinators and expressed confusion about funding coverage. They also voiced concerns about the rising cost of living and the need for increased funding to cover necessities. Much of the feedback said that funding does not adequately cover clients' holistic wellbeing.

Flexibility and Funding Restrictions

Families consistently emphasized the need for more flexible funding to better meet their diverse needs. The lack of flexibility was often seen as burdensome and “out of touch” with individual circumstances. Another area of concern was the spousal contribution requirement, which was viewed as a restrictive barrier to supports and also deterred clients from pursuing relationships. Additionally, most families felt that accessing mental health services, therapies, medications, through other departments was challenging.

Administrative Processes

Many clients cited a need for funding transparency, due to feeling uninformed about what services were covered. Participants also raised significant concerns about delays in approvals and reimbursements. The delays led to concerns about losing respite workers due to not being able to pay out of pocket while waiting for the funding to arrive.

Support for Caregivers and Respite Services

During the sessions, many caregivers expressed that their mental health is deeply impacted by the demands of caregiving and navigating burdensome AAS processes. They said there is an urgent need for more support and finding qualified respite workers.

Ideas for the Future

What changes could AAS and Residential Services consider?



- Broadening support options
- Creating more flexibility in funding categories
- Simplifying approval and reimbursement processes

EMERGING THEMES:

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Residential Options

Transitions to Residential Care

Participants emphasized the importance of residential options that foster a sense of community. They also expressed the importance of personalized and well-planned transitions into residential settings, starting with proactive succession planning. Many caregivers/parents indicated there is no plan in place if there was a sudden change in circumstances or if they were no longer able to care for their loved one.

Quality and Consistency

Many clients shared positive opinions on residential programs, while emphasizing the need for consistent and high-quality care. Some expressed concerns about limited oversight and concerns about staff turnover and the impact on care quality were also widely shared. They also noted a need for more 1 on 1 support time, as current staffing levels can leave employees stretched too thin to provide individualized care. Participants suggested that additional training could further strengthen the quality of care provided in residential services.

Residential options could be better supported with more 1 on 1 time. Staff are too busy.

Housing Accessibility

Participants highlighted significant housing availability and affordability challenges, noting that systemic issues like rising rent costs create additional barriers for individuals with accessibility needs. Many reported long wait times for residential placements and a shortage of accessible housing, in addition to reporting a lack of clarity about the steps to secure residential support, which has led to missed opportunities and delays in receiving living assistance.

Ideas for the Future

What changes could AAS and Residential Services consider?



- Implementing regular residential care inspections
- Enhancing transition support processes
- Clarifying housing option information