



PROTECTION & ADVOCACY PROJECT
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ND Protection & Advocacy Project
Revamps Supported Decision Making for People with Disabilities

(Bismarck, ND) Supported Decision-Making, known as SDM, went into ND law in 2019. The American Bar Association calls it a “cutting edge alternative to guardianship.” Supported Decision-Making is a process for making well-informed, voluntary decisions by methods less restrictive than guardianship or conservatorship. SDM allows individuals with disabilities to make their own decisions and stay in charge of their lives, while receiving help and assistance as needed.

On January 7, 2022, there were 3,212 guardianships in ND. Guardianship occurs when a court decides a person can no longer legally make decisions and gives that person’s decision-making power to someone else, who is called a guardian. By their very nature, guardianships strip an individual of their decision-making rights. These decisions can be limited to certain areas or extend to all aspects of an individual’s life. Mandy Dendy, P&A staff attorney states, “SDM is a way to help support a person with a disability so they can be a decision-maker whether they are in a guardianship, at-risk of having a guardianship, or they just need a little help.”

The North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project (P&A) and various partners worked diligently to revamp and republish, [A Guide to Independence](#), a manual for individuals with disabilities and others that explains Supported Decision-Making. The guide describes the process and principles of SDM and relevant laws. It contains a user-friendly SDM Agreement template and a multitude of SDM and guardianship [resources](#). Limited print copies of the manual are now available.

P&A will be offering free in-person learning events statewide to enhance the usage of SDM in ND. Veronica Zietz, Executive Director of P&A explains, “We want to encourage people with disabilities to live independently whenever appropriate and part of that is being empowered to make their own decisions about how they live, where they work, and more.” SDM trainings are open to all. People with disabilities or lived experience who participate may be eligible for transportation stipends. Additionally, professionals in the helping fields and the justice system are encouraged to attend with 1.5 CLE available for attorneys and 1.5 CEUs available for social workers. Events will be held at various times in Bismarck on April 22, in Dickinson on May 2, in Williston on May 3, in Jamestown on May 18, in Fargo on June 22, and in Grand Forks on July 13. Dates are pending for Minot and Devils Lake. Go to <https://www.ndpanda.org/events> for more information and to register for these free events.

P&A’s Supported Decision-Making efforts are generously supported by the **ND State Council on Developmental Disabilities**. The North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project is a federally mandated, independent state agency established in 1977 to advance the human and legal rights of people with disabilities. P&A’s mission is to champion the equality and inclusion of people with disabilities where we live, work and play. P&A fulfills its mission by providing services to individuals with disabilities and their support networks; these services include information and referral, assistance with self-advocacy, education and training, advocacy services, legal representation, protective services, and systems and legislative advocacy.

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