

California Department of Developmental Services Home and Community Based Settings Virtual Site Assessments Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

The California Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has contracted with an independent third party, Public Consulting Group (PCG), to conduct virtual site assessments of a randomized, statistically valid sample of HCBS settings in California. PCG has been working with DDS since 2018 to conduct trainings and more recently to develop a virtual site assessment plan to come into compliance with the federal HCBS Settings Final Rule.¹

The virtual site assessment is designed to measure providers' current level of compliance with the HCBS rules and provide a framework for assisting providers with the necessary steps to align their services with the federal rules. The goal in completing a site assessment is to acquire a 360-degree view of how services are delivered in the setting in which providers are operating, and most importantly, how that provider is responsive to the people being supported. Service delivery may be different in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this is bound to continue to evolve. It is important to understand how services are being provided differently, and to hear of the successes and challenges providers experience. It is acceptable for providers to not currently be in compliance with all of the requirements. There is time to develop transition plans to help bring providers into compliance by March 2023. Additionally, a provider may not be solely responsible for the activities associated with each question, as some of the questions may be a shared responsibility with the regional center or another entity.

Each individual and service provider is unique. As a result, there are many ways to align services in California to meet the federal requirements. Collecting input from individuals on their experience is necessary to ensure services are individualized and person-centered since there is not a singular template or service design that can be used to meet these requirements in all situations. Individuals receiving services will be asked to discuss their experiences in the setting and community and answer questions regarding their support from providers.

Please refer to the FAQs below to better understand this project and PCG's plans to move forward with virtual site assessments. PCG is committed to creating a safe virtual environment for all providers and individuals.

For more information regarding the CMS regulations for Home and Community-Based Services please visit the following link to the DDS website: <https://www.dds.ca.gov/initiatives/cms-hcbs-regulations/>.

¹ Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, "Home and Community Based Services Final Regulation," *Medicaid.gov*, <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/home-community-based-services/guidance/home-community-based-services-final-regulation/index.html>.

Purpose of the Virtual Site Assessment

Q: Why is DDS conducting virtual site assessments?

A: All states are required to review, analyze, and report the results of all settings in which Home and Community–Based Services (HCBS) are delivered. DDS is conducting virtual site assessments of a sample of settings as one part of its effort to come into compliance with the federal HCBS Settings Final Rule. The purpose of the Final Rule is to maximize the opportunities for individuals to receive services in integrated settings and realize the benefits of community living, including opportunities to seek employment and work in competitive integrated settings.

Q: How do virtual site assessments differ from other DDS site visits?

A: PCG and DDS have agreed to conduct these assessments virtually to assure the safety of staff, providers, and the people receiving services. PCG staff will interview designated site staff virtually to determine each site’s level of compliance with the HCBS Final Rule. Our HCBS site assessments typically would consist of an in-person visit to meet with staff, talk to people receiving services, and observe the environment; however, under existing health and safety concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person visits will not be happening at this time. Virtual site assessments will be conducted via Microsoft Teams.

Types of Settings Assessed

Q: Which settings will be assessed?

A: A random and statistically valid sample (1,200) of the following settings/regional center services will receive virtual site assessments:

Residential Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult Family Home Family Teaching Home Adult Residential Facility/Adult Residential Facilities for Persons with Special Health Care Needs Certified Family Home/Foster Family Home/Small Family Home Group Home Residential Care Facility for the Elderly
Day-Type Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity Center Adult Day Care Facility Adult Development Center Behavior Management Program Community-Based Training Provider Socialization Training Program Community Integration Training Program Community Activities Support Service
Employment Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supported Employment (Group Services) Work Activity Program

Q: Will all settings receive a virtual site assessment?

A: Approximately 1,200 settings from the total number of California sites will receive a virtual site assessment, and additional sites may be selected. The sample will be based on the sampling methodology developed by PCG and approved by DDS. DDS and regional centers will continue to work with all providers to complete an assessment, so that baseline information can be gathered for all providers. All providers will be included in the pool of providers who may be selected for a virtual site assessment conducted by PCG, regardless of whether they completed a self-assessment or not. Virtual Site Assessment Preparation and Timing

Q: Will providers be notified of the virtual site assessment beforehand?

A: Yes. Virtual site assessments will be scheduled in collaboration with providers. Providers will be contacted directly by PCG staff for scheduling. PCG's team will communicate directly with providers either by email or telephone (listed at the end of this document) to determine the best time to meet with staff and potential individuals to be interviewed.

Q: When will the virtual site assessments be conducted?

A: Sites identified will receive virtual site assessments now through June 2021. Virtual site assessments may be scheduled throughout the day with the possibility of late afternoon/early evening hours if they are more convenient for the provider. We will work with providers to flexibly schedule the visits to accommodate both the people receiving services to be interviewed (based on their willingness) and the providers.

Q: What application or equipment is needed to conduct the virtual site assessment?

A: PCG prefers that providers utilize Microsoft Teams to complete the virtual site assessment. This application provides the safest private virtual environment. If for some reason you are not able to access Microsoft Teams, PCG has a list of trouble shooting tips to guide you. Please call or email PCG for that guide. PCG is committed to work with providers to troubleshoot and make sure the provider is set up and ready at their scheduled, virtual time.

Q: What activities will take place during the virtual site assessment?

A: PCG staff will virtually meet with providers to discuss each site's policies, procedures, and daily operations. During a typical site assessment, PCG staff would tour the site and observe activities taking place; however, current health and safety circumstances will not allow for this. As a solution, we recreated a similar experience in a virtual environment. Providers will be expected to provide a virtual tour for PCG assessors, so they are able to visualize the space. PCG assessors will also work with providers to best understand the site's environment and the day-to-day activities in the setting by discussing various documents, daily activities, and operations. Additionally, PCG assessors will meet with individuals receiving services in the setting to understand how individuals are supported in the setting and to document individuals' feedback on their experiences within the setting.

Q: How long will the virtual site assessment take?

A: Virtual site assessments will take approximately two hours. The actual time it takes to complete the virtual site assessment will depend on various factors, including the number of individuals receiving services, the services provided, and the provider's preparation time for the virtual site assessment.

Q: As a provider, how should I prepare for the virtual site assessment?

A: To prepare for the virtual site assessment, providers should review the questions that will be asked so that the designated responders are familiar with the questions and information to be discussed. It is at a provider's discretion if they want to have more than one staff person participate in the conversation. It is important to assure that participants are knowledgeable about the setting, the agency, and the people who are supported/receiving services. Virtual site assessments are designed to include discussions about typical daily activities and interviews in the setting to document the provider's current level of compliance with the HCBS Settings Final Rule.

To make the virtual site assessments as seamless as possible, providers are asked to assure that the Administrator or designee is available for questions during the scheduled visit time. Providers should have individuals who receive services (based on willingness) available to meet privately with PCG assessors as part of the virtual site assessment. A private and quiet area should be provided for the interviews for a safe, virtual environment. Other types of arrangements can be made for individual interviews if an individual(s) is not available at the time of the visit. If individuals attend a day program or, for other reasons, are not able to attend the scheduled visit but would like to participate, PCG will make necessary arrangements accordingly.

Helpful Tips to Enhance the Virtual Site Assessment Experience

PCG encourages providers to prepare for the virtual site assessment by following this checklist:

1. PCG will not be doing a documentation review but recommend that providers review and familiarize themselves with policies, procedures, and IPPs prior to the visit.
2. Provide a copy of the DDS FAQs to the direct support staff in the setting prior to the visit.
3. Ensure supporting staff are available to answer questions from the site assessor(s) at the date and time scheduled for the visit.
4. Review and confirm Microsoft Teams access prior to the visit. Instructions on downloading Microsoft Teams is sent with the calendar event and found on the webpage.
5. PCG will be assessing providers currently providing services, both virtually and face-to-face. In this case, we will work with the provider to also conduct the individual interview by having them join the meeting after the provider interview is completed (or conduct by another method).
6. As we don't ever plan for tech issues, should they arise, confirm who your primary and secondary contact is for the visit. Make sure and double check everyone is on the same page for the visit. Confirm phone numbers and email address for the person that is responsible for getting everyone from the provider side together at the confirmed date and time for a successful visit.
7. Review and make available a copy of the lease or residential agreement signed by people receiving services.

Q: Which documents should I have available for the virtual site assessment?

A: Providers should be prepared to discuss and display all components related to the day-to-day operations of the setting. Site assessors may request information relating to operations including an organization's policies and procedures, scheduled activities, and daily operations.

Specific documentation that may be asked about includes but is not limited to the following: setting license, person-centered plans (ISPs and IPPs), admission agreements, residency agreements, activity calendars, visitor policy, meal schedules, personal rights, house rules, eviction process, and termination policy.

Q: As a provider, what if I have not submitted my self-assessment?

A: The virtual site assessment is not contingent upon the completion of a self-assessment, so you may be chosen to be in the random sample to receive a virtual site assessment regardless of whether or not you have completed a self-assessment. If you have not completed a self-assessment, you can reach out to your regional center to discuss next steps to complete it.

Virtual Site Assessment Results

Q: Who will determine each site's level of compliance?

A: PCG staff will analyze the information collected from the virtual site assessment to determine each site's level of compliance. PCG's staff will provide the site reports to DDS with a recommendation of the site's compliance with the HCBS Final Rule. If a provider is not in compliance with all the requirements, there is time to develop a transition plan so the provider can achieve compliance by March 2023, the date by which states have to implement the federal requirements.

Q: Will providers be notified of the results of their virtual site assessment?

A: Yes. Providers will receive notification of the compliance determination based on the virtual site assessment.

Contact us!

If you have further questions regarding the HCBS Virtual Site Assessment, please either call the dedicated PCG Call Center or email the dedicated project inbox:

Dedicated Project Phone Line: 833-976-1858

Dedicated Email Inbox: CADDSHCBS@pcgus.com