

Individuals with developmental disabilities who receive services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities will soon have more flexibility and more options when choosing community services.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) approved five-year renewals of Nebraska's two Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Medicaid Waivers on Dec. 15.

"We not only asked the federal government to renew the waivers, we got approval to restructure them to give people more flexibility in choosing options for service," said Jodi Fenner, director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). "These comprehensive changes will dramatically improve the lives of the people we serve and give them more choices to achieve the outcomes that are important to them."

Fenner said the approval doesn't provide additional funding, but it's an exciting opportunity to use resources more efficiently so more people can be served. There's a potential for long-term cost savings because many individuals in services are preferring the less-expensive, non-specialized services that stretch their dollars farther and allow more self-direction and independence.

Examples of those services are: community living and day supports, home and vehicle modification, assistive technology, and respite services.

The waivers go into effect on Jan. 1, 2011 with a gradual implementation over the next year. Approximately 4,300 individuals receive community-based services and service coordination through the division.

Fenner said that individuals who are happy with their current services can maintain those services.

Other individuals who want to explore new services can make changes at their next scheduled

IPP meeting, or even sooner if an emergency arises or someone is excited and wants to have a team meeting sooner to discuss their options.

“We’re developing a DVD for individuals and their families to explain the new services and to help our service coordinators highlight the new options during upcoming IPP meetings,” Fenner said.