

Using Virtual Integration Activities to Work Toward or Stay in HCBS Settings Rule Compliance During COVID-19

HCBS Settings Rule requires that Community Inclusion & Integration are facilitated by providers through services engaging in meaningful community interaction.

Community Inclusion & Integration is the opportunity for individuals receiving Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) to live in and have full access to their community to the same extent as those individuals not receiving HCBS; while being valued and treated with dignity and respect.

Although individuals are accessing their communities differently than before the pandemic, providers can still make changes and significant progress towards compliance.

This document is intended to give providers some ideas as to how they can continue to work on remediation during COVID-19.

What is Community?

Community commonly refers to physical places in and around where a person lives, works, and socializes. In this situation, under the Settings Rule, community must also include meaningful interaction with individuals not associated with the setting or provider-controlled location. Some examples may include neighborhoods, clubs, multicultural centers, religious organizations, online/virtual communities, and support groups, among other groups.

Community is not necessarily a location. Staying connected and having a meaningful interaction is a key component of Community Inclusion & Integration.

What is Meaningful Community Interaction?

Meaningful interaction with community members involves interaction with people in the community that anyone not receiving services would engage with, giving the opportunity to develop additional friendships, relationships and associations with. Interaction with anyone associated with the setting, including staff, volunteers, or other individuals receiving services, does not count as meaningful community interaction.

Reverse integration involves bringing people and activities from the broader community into the setting, instead of supporting people in the setting to access the broader community. Reverse integration activities are not sufficient to meet the requirements of the HCBS.

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Settings Rule: Visits by community members have value, but cannot replace community access for individuals.

We recognize that each individual's comfort level in accessing their community is different, and this is accentuated by the pandemic. It is important that an individual is given the choice to balance safety and individual preferences when it comes to community integration.

What Does Virtual Integration Look Like?

What types of virtual activities promote Community Integration & Inclusion?

- Live Content: Individuals are able to ask questions and interact with the others such as the host, instructor, others playing the games, etc.
- Open to the Public (Integrated): It can be targeted to a specific interest/activity but not limited to a specific disability or those served by HCBS Medicaid Waiver services.
- Ability to Meet New People: It is a bonus if the online community is local and there is the ability to meet in person once the person is comfortable and/or restrictions have lessened.

For those individuals that are choosing to limit their exposure to the community at this time, virtual activities are an option available to ensure that individuals do not become segregated during the pandemic.

What can providers do to promote individuals staying connected to their community remotely or virtually?

1. Explore individual interests and then explore virtual options for those interests/activities
 - a. Recreational activities at the local gym or community rec center
 - b. Spiritual activities at their preferred church or spiritual organization
 - c. Cultural activities that support the individual's own cultural interests
 - d. Social activities or events in their community
 - e. Informed choice for employment activities such as calling businesses and setting up a virtual tour and Q/A session with employer
 - f. Volunteering at community non-profit organizations
 - g. Educational and training activities at community colleges, universities, libraries or community centers
 - h. Skill development such as online shopping, ordering groceries, or ordering food online
 - i. Other if something cannot be found, let the individuals create the virtual community themselves

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2. Teach individuals how to use technology to stay connected independently:
 - a. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, etc.
 - b. Virtual meeting platforms like Google Meet, Zoom, etc.
 - c. Phone apps to play virtual games, join virtual groups, etc.
3. Support individuals with attending virtual events or taking online classes
 - a. Live paint classes (YouTube Live, Facebook Live)
 - b. Virtual book clubs
 - c. Support individuals to virtually host “lunch and learns,” classes or demonstrations, that they invite the public to join

Individuals are not forced to participate in live virtual opportunities, just as they are not forced to go into the community if they do not want to, but they should be given the opportunity to do so.

How can settings ensure Community Integration & Inclusion is happening? Summary of Compliance Criteria

Choice is Offered:

- Offer a variety of experiences, including new experiences to individuals
- Diversity of choice is evident
- Process in place for individuals to choose something else (not participate in the activity and have an alternative activity)
- If virtual activities are offered, they have live content, are integrated, and there is an opportunity to meet new people
- There is a process in place to promote meaningful community interaction

Opportunities Meet Individual Interests:

- Activity options must reflect individual preferences and there is an ongoing process in place to regularly get individuals' input
- Must have a process to evaluate individual wants and needs; and take active measures to reasonably meet those needs and wants for all individuals
- Support individualized schedules
 - There is a process in place for individuals to choose what activities they participate in
 - There are no activities individuals are required to participate in
 - Individuals are a part of the process that determines activity schedule

**Q: How can I, as a provider, be a better Community Connector?
A: Seek “people” or “connections” rather than “activities”.**

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Please click on the following link for a list of community resources to assist in virtual integration and inclusion activities:

[Integration Activities Community Resources](#)

For additional information on Community Inclusion and Integration:

[HCBS Settings Rule: Community Inclusion & Integration](#)

[HCBS Settings Rule: Community Inclusion & Integration Examples](#)

Submit any questions to HCBSSettings@utah.gov

Find additional resources here: <https://medicaid.utah.gov/ltc-2/hcbstransition/>

