Casey DeLuca Updated 8.7.24

**Self-Direction Pilot Program: Participant Handbook**

**Section 17 waiver**

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# Self-Direction Pilot Overview

The Maine Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) Self-Direction Pilot Program provides you with more choice, control, and flexibility over the goods and services you use to reach your goals.

Self-direction is becoming more popular around the world. In the United States, most people who self-direct have physical disabilities or intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, self-direction is growing as a way to help people with behavioral health needs. With this pilot program, Maine will be a leading state in advancing self-direction for mental health.

The Self-Direction Pilot will run from through March 2025. Up to 120 participants will be served through the pilot. The pilot is funded through Section 9817 of the federal American Rescue Plan Act.

The Self-Directed Care Advisory Committee meets monthly to provide input on program operations, suggests improvements, and assists with problem-solving any issues. The committee includes individuals with systems experience, mental health advocates, and self-direction program participants. Contact Kristin Thorp at [Kristin.M.Thorp@maine.gov](mailto:Kristin.M.Thorp@maine.gov) to learn more about getting involved.

OBH is partnering with a team of independent research staff at the University of Southern Maine (USM) to evaluate the implementation and impact of self-direction. If you participate in the pilot, you will have the option to share your thoughts and feedback about the pilot through surveys and/or listening sessions.

The evaluation results will help Maine OBH decide whether to offer self-direction across the state.

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# Handbook Introduction

This handbook outlines key aspects of the Self-Direction Pilot Program for the Section 17 Waiver. The handbook includes information about self-direction, pilot eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities, budgeting guidelines, and purchasing information.

# Self-Direction

## What is Self-Direction?

Self-direction allows you more choice, flexibility, and control to reach your goals. Self-direction is built on the belief that YOU are the expert in your own life.

## How Does Self-Direction Work?

You manage a monthly budget. You identify items that support the goals in your person-centered Individual Services Plan (ISP) and then purchase them with your budget. (This is called “budget authority”.) What you buy depends on your unique goals and needs. Budget authority does not mean you can spend the money any way you want. But budget authority gives you a lot of flexibility and control.

The items and services you buy are called your “Individual-Directed Goods and Services.” They are “individual-directed” because YOU are deciding- and directing- what you need.

## Self-Direction Roles and Responsibilities

While you are the ultimate decision-maker in self-direction, you are not alone. You are supported by your community support provider, support broker, Financial Management Services (FMS) provider, OBH Project Manager, and even a representative if you choose.

Below are the responsibilities for all the different roles in self-direction.

### You

* Makes the decisions
* Determines what services and supports you need to meet your goals
* Manages a monthly budget
* Makes purchasing choices
* Asks for help when needed

### Community Support Provider

Your community support provider/case manager works with you to develop your person-centered ISP to promote your wellness and integration into your community. During the Self-Direction Pilot, your community support provider:

* Introduces self-direction to you
* Answers your initial questions about self-direction
* Helps you enroll in the pilot
* Adds self-direction to your person-centered ISP
* Answers questions about the MaineCare services you do not self-direct
* Works with you to update the goals in your person-centered ISP as needed

### Support Broker

A support broker is a self-direction expert who helps you with your day-to-day tasks as needed. Alpha One will provide support brokerage for the Self-Direction Pilot. Your support broker:

* Answers your questions about self-direction
* Helps you get started in self-direction
* Works with you to make sure your spending meets program guidelines
* Helps you plan how to spend and manage your budget
* Offers support and resources but does not make decisions for you

### Financial Management Services (FMS) Provider

Another important support in self-direction is the Financial Management Services (FMS) provider. Alpha One provides FMS for the self-direction pilot. The FMS provider:

* Reconciles the purchases on your self-direction debit card with your submitted receipts
* Processes necessary reports for monthly billing
* Adds money to your debit card each month

### Maine Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) Project Manager

Kristin Thorp is the Maine OBH Project Manager managing the Self-Direction Pilot. The OBH Project Manager:

* Confirms you are eligible for the self-direction pilot
* Oversees pilot operations
* Troubleshoots if you and your support broker have questions

### Representative

Representatives are optional. If you need or want help self-directing, you can pick someone to be your representative. A representative is:

* Usually, a trusted family member or friend
* An unpaid role
* Not someone you pay to provide support to you

See page 7 for more information about representatives.

# Enrollment

Your community support provider introduces self-direction and answers your initial questions about the pilot.

To enroll in the pilot, you must:

* reside in Cumberland, Hancock, or Washington County,
* be age 18+ or an emancipated minor; and
* meet eligibility criteria for MaineCare Section 17 Community Integration Services.

You cannot participate in the Self-Direction Pilot Program if you live in a group home or institutional setting.

One you decide you want to self-direct, your community support provider submits the Self-Direction Pilot Referral Form. (You are also able to self-refer using the same form).

# Getting Started

Once enrolled in the pilot, you will have an introductory call with your support broker. During this call, you and your support broker schedule your enrollment meeting.

## Self-Direction Purchase Plan

With support from your support broker, you will complete a Self-Direction Purchase Plan for each item you decide to purchase. The purchase plan includes:

* The good or service you will purchase.
* The documented goal or outcome from your person-centered ISP this item will meet.
* How the purchase will help you achieve your goal or outcome.

## Self-Direction Budget

You manage a monthly budget to purchase items that support the goals from your person-centered ISP. Budgets are set at a maximum of $1,200 per month during the one-year pilot period. However, spending will vary based on your personal goals.

Money cannot roll over from one month to another.

## Individual-Directed Goods and Services

Your “Individual-Directed Goods and Services” are items you buy with your self-direction budget. You and your support broker must complete a Self-Direction Purchase Plan for each item you want to buy. Items must be tied to a goal in your person-centered ISP.

You and your support broker must update your Self-Direction Budgeting Tool to confirm there is funding available in your budget before making a purchase.

While you have a lot of choice and control over what you buy, there are state rules about what you can and cannot purchase.

If you or your support broker have questions about whether an item meets program guidelines and can be tied to your goals, contact the OBH Project Manager, Kristin Thorp, at [Kristin.M.Thorp@maine.gov](mailto:Kristin.M.Thorp@maine.gov) for help.

You can talk to your support broker if you want to purchase an item that is not currently allowed. If you feel strongly that the item would help meet a goal in your person-centered ISP, you and/or your support broker may request an exception from the OBH Project Manager, Kristin Thorp, at [Kristin.M.Thorp@maine.gov](mailto:Kristin.M.Thorp@maine.gov).

## Basic Purchase Requirements

The items you purchase with your self-direction budget must meet all ten of the criteria below:

1. DIRECTLY related to a specific goal on your ISP AND
2. REQUIRED to maintain or increase wellness and/or independence and/or community participation and/or productivity AND
3. REQUIRED solely because of the direct effects of your mental health support needs AND
4. DOES NOT replace existing voluntary support system and resources AND
5. DOES NOT replace other government benefits (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, MaineCare, Supplemental Security Income) AND
6. DOES NOT provide for **basic needs** of food, shelter, clothing AND
7. COST- EFFECTIVE use of public resources AND
8. NEVER a cash payment to you, family, or friends AND
9. NEVER for activities that are purely recreational AND
10. NEVER for services delivered outside of the U.S. or its territories.

# Making Purchases

Once you complete your Self-Direction Purchase Plan and update your Self-Direction Budgeting Tool, you can make your purchase with your True Link Debit Card. Your support broker can help if you have any questions about making the purchase.

## True Link Debit Card

You use your True Link debit card to purchase your Individual-Directed Goods and Services. Your debit card will deduct funds directly from your self-direction budget.

You will receive your True Link Debit Card within 7-14 days of the introductory call with your support broker. (You can receive the card by mail or in-person during your enrollment meeting with your support broker.)

Funds will be added to your True Link Debit Card after you complete your enrollment meeting with your support broker. You can only use your True Link Debit Card after funds are added, the item is included in your Self-Direction Purchase Plan, and you’ve completed the Self-Direction Budgeting Tool.

Your support broker can help you activate the card and set the PIN if you need help.

Alpha One, the FMS provider, will add your monthly budget to your True Link card by the 3rd of each month. If funds do not appear on the card, contact your support broker.

You can call the True Link customer service line listed on the back of your card for balance inquiries or other questions.

You can also download the True Link App to view your card balance. Your support broker can help you set up the app if needed.

## Receipts

You must obtain a receipt for all purchases made on your True Link debit card. The receipt must include the:

* store name,
* date, and
* purchase price, including tax

Only items purchased with the True Link debit card should be included on the receipt.

You must submit your receipt to your support broker within 7 days of the purchase. You can email or text a screenshot of the receipt or submit the original receipt(s) by mail or in-person.

Once you and your support broker ensure everything is accurate and accounted for, your support broker will email receipts to the FMS provider along with your Self-Direction Purchase Plan and Budget Tool.

## Misspending

It is important to follow the program's rules and only use your budget to purchase allowable items.

Mistakes may happen, but breaking program rules on purpose may be considered fraud and may result in involuntary termination from the program.

Examples of fraud include:

* [Knowingly](#_w6es3imht39g) purchasing items that aren’t allowed
* Falsifying a receipt for a purchase
* Purchasing an item with money from your budget and then selling it

Examples of misspending include:

* Buying items that are not listed on your Self-Direction Purchase Plan
* Buying a larger quantity of items than what is on the Self-Direction Purchase Plan
* Debiting cash from an ATM
* Purchase gift cards
* Allowing someone else to use your card
  + This could be considered financial exploitation and should be reported to Adult Protective Services
* Purchases made with a card that was reported lost/stolen
* Not providing a receipt for a purchase

What if my card is lost or stolen?

* You must notify your support broker within 24 hours of the card being lost or stolen.
* The FMS provider will order a new True Link card within 2 business days.
* FMS provider will deactivate the old card within 30 minutes of being reported lost/stolen.
* You will be charged a $5 card replacement fee for each replacement card.
  + You must pay the fee to the FMS provider within 7-14 days of receiving the new card.

# Additional Support: Representative

If you are interested in self-directing but feel uncomfortable making decisions on your own, you can choose a representative.

### What is a Representative?

A representative assists you with self-direction responsibilities. For example, the representative can:

* Collaborate with you to use your budget to support your goals.
* Make responsible purchases of items from your budget and keep track of the necessary documentation, such as receipts.
* Attend meetings with you.
* Receive and review copies of notices and reports sent to you by the FMS provider.

### Who can be my Representative?

You choose your representative. Your representative could be anyone you feel comfortable asking to help make decisions, for example, a family member or friend.

Representatives may not be paid but rather volunteer to assist you with the responsibilities of self-direction.

### How do I Decide if I Want a Representative?

Think about the responsibilities of being in a self-direction program and decide if you can do them alone or if you want help. Some questions you could ask yourself include:

* Can I manage a budget?
* Can I make sure my purchases are related to a goal?
* Can I keep track of my receipts?

Your support broker can help you think through whether or not you would like a representative.

# Appendix A: Pilot Program Glossary

**Community Support Provider:** Also known as your “case manager”.

**Financial Management Services (FMS) provider:** The FMS provider handles the financial and administrative tasks that come with self-direction. Alpha One is the FMS provider for the Self-Direction Pilot Program.

**Individual-Directed Goods and Services:** The items and services you choose to purchase using your self-direction budget based on your goals.

**Person-Centered:** An ongoing planning process to develop and update your Individual Service Plan (ISP) based on your strengths, needs, preferences, and goals. You lead the creation of the plan with the support of your community support provider.

**Representative:** If you need or want support managing a budget or other self-direction responsibilities, you can pick someone to help you. A representative will make decisions with you, not for you. A representative is not a paid position and cannot provide paid services to you as a worker.

**Support Broker:** A support broker is a self-direction expert who helps you with your day-to-day tasks as needed. Alpha One provides support brokerage for the Self-Direction Pilot Program.

**Self-Direction Budget:** The monthly budget you manage to purchase items that support the goals from your person-centered ISP. Budgets are set at a maximum of $1,200 per month during the pilot period.

**Self-Direction Budgeting Tool:** With support from your support broker, you will update your budget with each purchase to track monthly spending and annual limits.

**Self-Direction Purchase Plan:** With support from your support broker, you will complete this form for each item you decide to purchase with your self-direction budget.