

Self-Direction in Rural Settings: A Wyoming Case Study

Wyoming is the 10th largest state by geographic area, but the least populous state in the country. More than 91% of land in Wyoming is classified as "rural" and almost half (47%) of the residents live in frontier areas of the state. Frontier areas are the most remote and sparsely populated regions, with residents far from healthcare, schools, grocery stores, and other necessities.



Self-direction is a crucial resource for individuals in the most frontier and rural areas of Wyoming.

Self-direction is the only way to support people who want to live in many of these frontier areas. More than half (56%) of the self-directing participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities live in frontier counties. Unlike many other states, self-direction is often the primary service option in Wyoming.

Prior to Self-Direction

Prior to self-direction, people in rural Wyoming with long-term care (LTC) needs had three options:

1. Go without services. 
2. Move to an area with access to services. 
3. Enter a LTC facility. 



In the absence of self-direction, there was a trend of people with disabilities moving to the county capital where the state's largest developmental disabilities provider was located. It was just assumed that at some point, older adults would need to leave their homes, families, and friends and move to a town with a nursing facility.

Why Self-Direction Works in Rural Settings



Self-direction allows people to live in the home and community - or lack of community - of their choosing.

Wyoming's Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers serve a total of 5,733 people statewide across populations. For many people, self-direction is the only option to receive support in their homes.



Self-direction helps fill in workforce gaps.

Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) shortages are a real problem in Wyoming, even in urban areas. Home health agencies are competing for CNAs with the hospital, assisted living, and nursing facilities. Self-direction allows people to hire their own workers, often family members or friends, to provide the services and supports they need.



Self-direction provides flexible schedules.

People receiving support from home health agencies are required to subject their needs to the availability of the agency staff. When self-directing, the person can set their worker's schedule based on their own needs and preferences.



Self-direction ensures support during natural disasters.

During natural disasters, self-direction is invaluable because caregivers are often nearby and available to provide care.



Self-direction supports individuals' cultural needs.

Fremont County is mostly made up of a large Native American reservation. Almost half (40%) of all older adults and people with physical disabilities self-directing in Wyoming live in their community in a way that is sensitive to their cultural needs and considerations. For many older adults, it is extremely important to have workers who understand their culture. Many long-term care facilities are not accessible to family visits and the food is different from what the person is culturally used to which can cause digestive and other health issues.

Conclusion

Self-direction is a lifeline for people living in frontier and rural areas, as it allows them to receive the services they need while safely remaining in the community where they feel most at home. Self-direction also gives people control over who provides their support, expanding the pool of potential workers to include friends, family, and neighbors, as well as the opportunity for people to hire workers who understand their cultural needs. Without self-direction, frontier and rural residents would have to rely on a limited pool of home health agency staff that may or may not be available. In the absence of available workers, many people are unable to remain in their homes and must move to an institution by default. In Wyoming, and rural areas across the country, self-direction is an essential offering to help people to remain in the community of their choosing.

Thank you to the Wyoming Department of Health for their help in developing this resource.



Applied
Self-Direction