

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION PROFILE

- **Background**

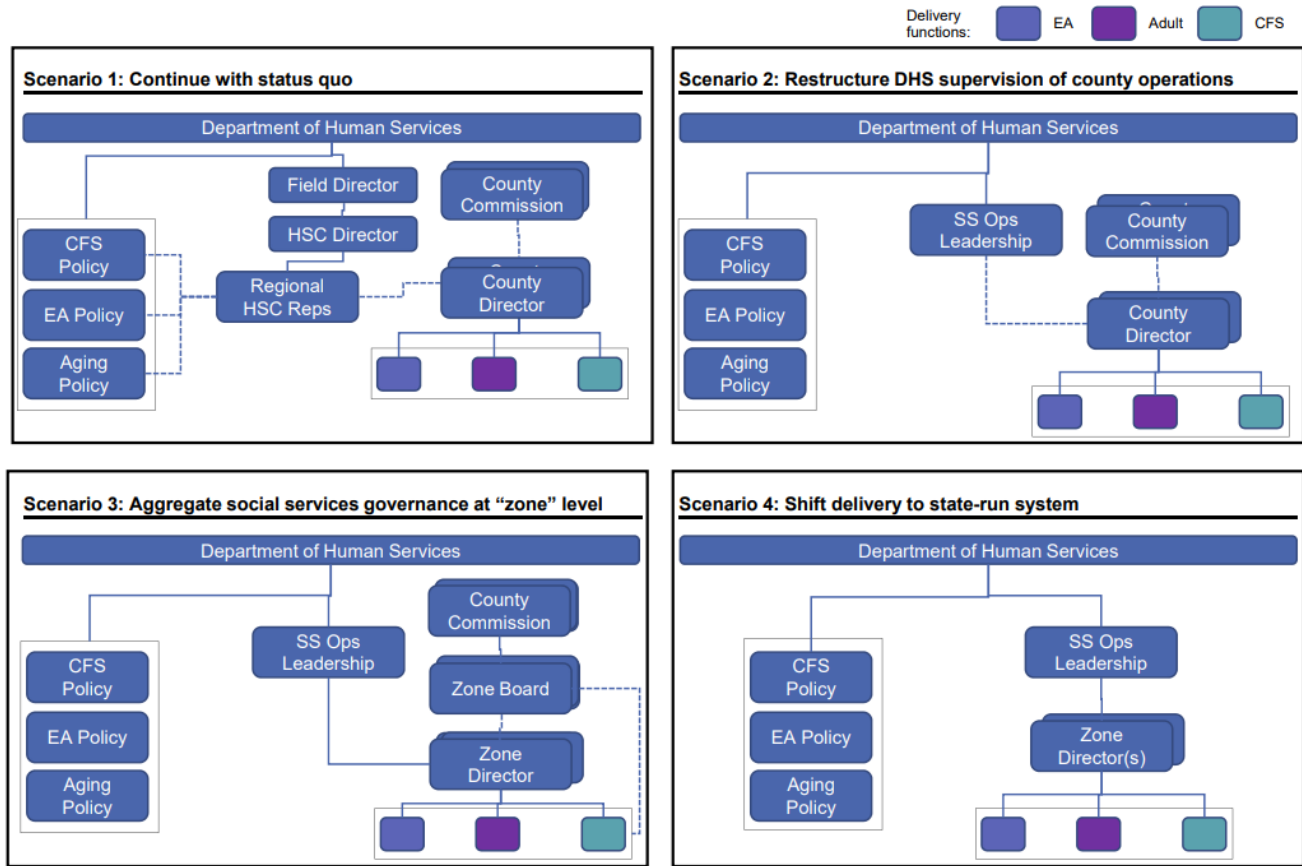
- The North Dakota Department of Human Services (ND DHS) oversees the following divisions: Aging Services, Behavioral Health, Economic Assistance, Medical Services, Child Support, Children and Family Services, Development Disability Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation.
- North Dakota DHS began as a state-supervised, county-administered system. Over time, the state slowly began to introduce regional offices to assist in the supervision of local agencies and the administration of certain programs and services.
- For example, the ND DHS staffs and operates eight Regional Human Service Centers, eight Regional Child Support Units, and eight Regional Vocational Rehabilitation Offices. These offices may provide direct client services and/or supervise the administration of programs through county departments and community service providers.
- Counties in North Dakota are responsible for administering direct client services in conjunction with and under the supervision of ND DHS. North Dakota's 53 counties currently operate from 45 Social Service District Offices. Some counties chose to consolidate local offices to conserve resources and increase efficiency.
 - Counties have had the statutory authority to consolidate for several years. Some consolidated right away.

- **Two Year Pilot Program**

- North Dakota DHS assumed all financial responsibility for the administration of social service programs and services across the state for two years beginning in January 2018, relieving county departments of all financial burdens for the time being.
- Calls for system reform have resulted from a decreasing population size (decreasing DHS case load) and an increasing reliance on property taxes for the funding of programs and services.
- Over the course of the two year pilot program, DHS must study the administration of social services program in ND and develop recommendations for system reform. Analysis and recommendations must specifically address the following:
 - recommendations for caseloads and outcomes for social services, designated child welfare services, and economic assistance;
 - considerations regarding the delivery of county social services to ensure appropriate and adequate levels of service continue;
 - options for efficiencies and aggregation;
 - analysis of the potential reduction in social service offices, organizations, and staff due to consolidations;
 - the feasibility and desirability of, and potential timeline for, transitioning county social service staff to the department of human services;
 - and considerations for oversight and chain of command within social services and human services.

- **Progress to Date**

- Under the leadership of DHS Executive Director Chris Jones, reform efforts have focused on identifying the ideal system for program delivery from a client outcome perspective. Stakeholders participating in the reform process were encouraged to develop new visions for program delivery unconstrained by the boundaries and limitations of ND DHS' existing structure.
- Subsequently, 4 potential scenarios for system reform were developed:



- **Emerging Vision**

- Eliminate state-run, regional offices from administrative structure.
 - These offices are difficult to staff and often create an additional layer of bureaucracy that decreases efficiency and creates confusion regarding the DHS chain of command.
 - These offices provided program supervision in the past, but played a limited role in administration of services. Counties have historically found this supervision to be lacking.
- Mandatory consolidation of county departments into 19 "Zones" or multi-county units.
 - Some counties have already elected to consolidate;
 - Counties that have chosen to consolidate are responding positively to the transition;
 - Consolidation has become increasingly popular – there will be seven consolidated offices as of January 2019.
 - Each Zone will have a director who will report directly to ND DHS central office;
 - Zone Office will be located in the "host county".
 - The host county will be identified based on case load and administrative infrastructure.
 - Employees within the zones will be locally employed (most likely by the host county) with each county contributing to funding unless the state chooses to assume additional financial responsibility moving forward.

- Counties will be afforded time to organize and plan for the transition into zones and make independent decisions regarding funding structure and leadership.
- Each zone will have a governing board comprised of representatives from each county within zone.
 - Zone will make decisions about county representation and voting rules of board.
- Although they may not be operational full time, ND DHS wants to avoid closing local offices in each county to ensure that direct client services are still accessible to residents.
 - Host counties will maintain administrative offices and use flexible office space in other counties within the zone as satellite offices.
 - This may limit the disruption to county employees who will be transitioning to zone employees.
 - Counties who have already consolidated have chosen to keep limited office space open in each one of the participating counties and this has proven helpful.
- **Challenges/Benefits to Potential Transition**
 - Anticipated challenges to transition:
 - Varying culture and benefits structures among county departments and county staff may pose a challenge to consolidation and may result in resistance/tension.
 - Making final decisions regarding who will serve as Host County and Zone Director may create animosity among staff once consolidation occurs.
 - Some management level positions may be transitioned into direct client services.
 - Choosing how to divide counties into zones may be a challenge – should they align with Public Health boundaries? Judicial Districts? How will Tribal Counties fit in to the new structure?
 - Anticipated benefits to transition:
 - Supervision, oversight, and training of direct service providers will be more consistent and comprehensive.
 - State will most likely take over funding for all federal and state mandated programs and services following the completion of the two year pilot program. This will eliminate some of the financial burden on county departments and may encourage more collaboration moving forward.
 - Funding of programs and services will be more flexible and responsive to changing community needs because it will be coordinated through a central office.
 - Funding decisions will be made based on emerging community needs rather than past allotments.
 - Steps are being taken to ensure that localization of services and client accessibility will not be negatively impacted by transition:
 - Counties will still have representation through zone boards.
 - Local field offices will remain open as to not overly burden program participants/service recipients, Zone Directors will be responsible for coordinating services provided through field offices.
 - County staff will still operate at a local level and should not have to re-locate.
 - Funding will be set aside and available to zones to address specific needs in their community that may not exist in other zones.
 - Counties will have an opportunity to organize themselves into zones before ND DHS takes over process. This may allow for pre-existing working relationships to stay intact.