

Guidance Document 45 Daily Living Activities-20 (DLA-20) Functional Assessment

Contract Reference: B.1.5.2.5

Requirements: 394.457(3), F.S.

394.495(2), F.S.

394.9082(5), F.S.

I. Purpose

The Department requires use of the DLA-20 assessment to be implemented throughout Managing entity networks between July 1, 2026 through October 1, 2026. Managing entities shall ensure compliance with the requirements for administering the Daily Living Activities-20 (DLA-20) Functional Assessment. Managing entities shall require contracted providers to use the most current version of the DLA-20 Functional Assessment tool, unless the Department specifies a different assessment tool by rule.

II. Authority

Section 394.457(3), F.S. – The Department shall require any provider directly under contract with the Department to use, at a minimum, the most recent version of the DLA-20 Functional Assessment Tool for any patient requiring functional assessment, unless the Department specifies in rule the use of a different assessment tool.

Section 394.495(2), F.S. – Within the children's and adolescent mental health system of care, assessment tools used must, at a minimum, include the use of the most recent version of the DLA-20 functional assessment tool, unless the Department specifies in rule the use of a different assessment tool.

Section 394.9082(5), F.S. – Managing entities must require use of the most recent version of the DLA-20 functional assessment tool by all providers under contract with the managing entity, unless the Department specifies in rule the use of a different assessment tool.

III. Description

The DLA-20 is an evidence-based functional assessment tool used in behavioral health care settings to assess individuals aged 6 years through adulthood, regardless of diagnosis. It evaluates how mental health symptoms and substance use impact an individual's ability to perform essential daily living activities.

By evaluating 20 distinct functional areas, the DLA-20 provides:

- Behavioral health criteria that support evidence-based treatment planning;
- A standardized method to track progress and recovery over time;
- Measurable outcomes that demonstrate the value and effectiveness of care; and
- Support for person-centered and strengths-based approaches to recovery and well-being.

The DLA-20 helps bridge the gap between symptoms and real-world functioning, ensuring services are both targeted and meaningful in promoting long-term recovery. It enhances recovery-oriented care and strengthens service delivery at multiple levels of the behavioral health system.

For individuals, the DLA-20:

- Supports the development and achievement of personal recovery goals;
- Promotes long-term stability, independence, and quality of life; and
- Enhances engagement in services by focusing on functional daily living skills and coping strategies.

For providers, the DLA-20:

- Increases the accuracy of identifying functional needs and barriers;
- Supports comprehensive treatment planning and appropriate level-of-care determinations; and
- Strengthens documentation for accountability, utilization review, and quality assurance.

For the system of care, the DLA-20:

- Offers an objective, standardized method to monitor progress and outcomes over time;
- Promotes consistent assessment practices across programs and providers; and
- Improves interagency communication and care coordination.

IV. Administration

To ensure accuracy, consistency, and reliability, professionals administering the DLA-20 must complete specialized training. This training promotes proper use of the tool and supports high-quality care by guiding evidence-based treatment planning and monitoring of outcomes.

The DLA-20 is administered through a structured interview to assess an individual's functional capabilities in areas of daily living over the past 30 days. The administration process includes:

- Information gathering (e.g., chart review, collateral input)
- Conducting the interview
- Scoring the assessment based on observable behaviors
- Interpreting the results to identify both functional strengths and areas of need

The DLA-20 must be completed within the first 30 days of intake to establish a functional baseline. After the baseline is established, it should be readministered at regular intervals to monitor changes in functional capacity over time. At a minimum, the DLA-20 must be readministered every six (6) months; however, it may be completed more frequently based on provider preference or as required by programmatic guidance. In addition, the DLA-20 must be administered at key transition points, including:

- At discharge, except in cases of unplanned discharge;
- When there is a change in level of care; and
- Following a significant life event.

If a client's mental health, cognitive functioning, or level of independence demonstrates a noticeable improvement or decline, the DLA-20 may be readministered to document the change. Administration of the DLA-20 without direct contact with the client is considered invalid. Direct contact includes in-person, telehealth/video, or telephone interaction. In cases of unplanned discharge, the score from the most recent DLA-20 administration should be used as the discharge score. If the individual receives an intake and disengages prior to the initial administration of the DLA-20 then re-engages in services, the assessment is administered at the next scheduled appointment.

For individuals receiving multiple services from the same network service provider, the DLA-20 must be completed once during each assessment period. Results must be documented in a centralized clinical record and made available to authorized staff involved in the individual's care across participating programs and services.

For individuals receiving services from multiple providers, a signed release of information may allow providers to share DLA-20 results with one another. Sharing results helps avoid unnecessary duplicate assessments, reduces burden on the individual, and supports coordinated service planning focused on improving functional outcomes.

V. Managing Entity Responsibilities

Managing entities must integrate the use of the DLA-20 into their network service provider contract standards, performance expectations, and quality assurance processes. This includes clearly communicating the requirement to use the current version of the DLA-20 across all applicable service settings, monitoring provider compliance, and

addressing any instances in which outdated or unauthorized assessment tools are used. Services exempt from the use of the DLA-20 are identified in Rule 65E-14.021, Florida Administrative Code or in applicable contract guidance documents. Exempt services include:

- Care Coordination
- Crisis Stabilization
- Crisis Support/Emergency
- Day Care
- Drop In/Self Help Centers
- HIV Early Intervention Services
- Incidental Expenses
- Information and Referral
- Inpatient
- Mental Health Clubhouse Services
- Outreach
- Prevention – Indicated
- Prevention – Selective
- Prevention – Universal Direct
- Prevention – Universal Indirect
- Respite Services
- Room and Board with Supervision Level I
- Room and Board with Supervision Level II
- Room and Board with Supervision Level III
- Room and Board with Supervision Level IV
- Substance Abuse Inpatient Detoxication
- Substance Abuse Outpatient Detoxification
- Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities (TASC)

Network service providers implementing an evidence-based model that requires the use of other assessment tools are exempt from the requirement to administer the DLA-20, as long as the model adequately addresses assessment and outcome measure requirements.

Managing entities are also responsible for ensuring that contracted network service providers obtain and maintain specialized training in the proper administration, scoring, and interpretation of the DLA-20. This responsibility may include maintaining and tracking training completion by DLA-20 Insights, facilitating access to new training opportunities by DLA-20 Insights, incorporating training requirements into provider contracts, and verifying that providers maintain the necessary competencies at required intervals over time.