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## Awareness, Access Key In Moving Forward With Developmental Disabilities Technology, Director Says

Boosting awareness of technology that aids people with developmental disabilities and increasing competition and access among companies that provide the devices are two ways state officials think the system can address staffing issues.

The expanded use of technology can also give people more independence, easing the need for round-the-clock staffing and saving costs while helping people live better lives, said John Martin, director of the Department of Developmental Disabilities.

The findings are the result of six months of work with a council tasked by Gov. John Kasich to explore ways to put "Technology First" in the DD system. The council's forthcoming report lays out a framework for the next administration to follow in expanding the use of tech in the system, Director Martin said.

"What we're hearing is that people actually prefer this to staff and that it really increases people's ability to be independent and increases people's ability to be involved in the community," Director Martin said in an interview. "What kind of started out as, 'it'll save money and help us deal with the crisis' has kind of transformed into, for some people, this is actually a better method of serving them and they respond better to it."

The work started in May when Gov. Kasich signed an executive order that created the committee and required technology to be a key part of conversations when an individual service plan is developed by a resident, their family, provider and service coordinator. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, May 24, 2018](#))

Since then, the council has worked to review the state of technology in the field and what issues can be addressed. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, August 1, 2018](#))

The council's seven proposed **benchmarks** include increasing the number of people using supportive technology to 2,150 within the next year, with 1,000 using remote supports and 1,150 using with assistive technology.

"We think with all the energy and all the stuff being discussed out in the field that that's very possible," Director Martin said.

The state currently has about 370 people using remote supports, he said. Assistive technology can include off-the-shelf devices such as Ring doorbells and the Amazon Echo.

A key to promoting awareness of the uses of technology is making sure people all over the state are using devices, he said. One benchmark sets a goal that every county has someone using remote supports or assistive technology. Another recommends county boards include the use of technology in their strategic plans.

"A big hurdle is just not knowing," Director Martin said. "A lot of families, a lot of service and support administrators don't know everything that is available and don't often think of technology as a solution or a partial solution. I think one of the biggest barriers is education and understanding.

"People can always choose not to use it," he added. "It's not appropriate for everybody. We're not here to say it's a magic bullet. We do think it's appropriate and even preferable to a lot more people than know about it. We're still very much in that education, learning phase. That'll take some time."

Another goal is to increase competition and access to the technology by boosting the number of companies providing devices, the director said. Two approaches for doing that will require changes to administrative rule: Increasing the number of state-approved providers from six to 10 and allowing the backup staff to be either agency or independent staff.

Both of those will make it easier for providers to do their work and encourage creativity, he said.

"Virtually every time technology is being used, there is some modification that is done," he said. "It's really person-centered. What we see is the more people we have in the space, the more opportunities there is for creativity, different approaches."

Remote supports could also provide a way to boost health care outcomes through telemedicine, Director Martin said. That approach is something he hopes the next administration tackles in more depth. The director, who is retiring, said he hopes to lay the groundwork for further discussion of that.

The director said a pilot project in another state reduced emergency room visits by 70% by having a physician available at one end of a two-way communication device for people in need of help.

"We're looking at how potentially that could be structured and who we're going to need at the table to keep that part of it moving forward," he said. "If we'd have had a year, we'd have probably spent a couple meetings just focusing on that and looking at how to do it."

Overall, the director said technology supports won't erase the state's problem of a shortage of direct support professionals but could help.

"We see that the issue of direct support staff is really complex and we're not going to solve it with one particular initiative," he said. "It takes a combination of initiatives, and we think this is an important part of that combination. Obviously more money to help staff do the work is important, but we think this is an important tool."