



WHY SUPPORT SERVICES NEED THEIR OWN QUALITY STANDARDS

What AMSI Means by “Standards”

AMSI SAM1

Revision 1.0 - Updated August 2026

AMERICAN SUPPORT STANDARDS INITIATIVE

Foreword

Support services matter because they affect real life.

They may help a person remain safe, communicate, work, participate in the community, move through daily life, or carry out activities that would otherwise be difficult or impossible.

Many systems already govern these services. Laws protect rights. Programs determine eligibility. Funding rules authorize payment. Employers organize work. Professional guidance supports practice. Individual plans describe needs, preferences, and goals.

All of these are important. But a simple question can still remain unanswered:

Did the support service actually help the person in the way it was supposed to?

A task may be authorized, scheduled, funded, completed, and documented while the person still does not receive the help, protection, choice, dignity, or practical result the service was intended to provide.

The American Support Standards Initiative (AMSI) begins with that difference between completed activity and the actual support result.

This introductory article explains why support services need their own quality standards and what AMSI means when it uses the word “standards.”

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1. Start with the Person and the Support

A support service exists for a reason. It is intended to help a particular person achieve or maintain something important in real life.

The service may involve personal care, vocational support, community participation, communication, mobility, supervision, skill development, or another form of assistance.

Before judging quality, the first questions are therefore simple: Who is receiving support? What support is needed? What is the service expected to help the person achieve or maintain?

2. Completed Activity Is Not the Same as Successful Support

A completed activity is evidence that something happened. It is not automatic proof that the intended support was achieved.

2.1 Bathing Example

A bathing task may be completed, but the person may have felt unsafe, rushed, uncomfortable, or unable to express a preference. The activity occurred, but the quality question remains open.

2.2 Mobility Example

A mobility task may be recorded, but the person may still be unable to move safely through the home or community under the conditions that actually exist.

2.3 Vocational Support Example

A job coach may complete a workplace visit, but the worker may still lack the support needed to perform the job, participate effectively, or remain employed.

For AMSI, the quality question therefore includes both what was done and what actually happened for the person as a result.

3. Why Existing Systems Do Not Answer the Same Question

Support services are influenced by many different systems. Each has an important purpose, but their purposes are not identical.

- Laws and regulations establish rights, duties, protections, and legal requirements.
- Programs and funding systems determine eligibility, authorization, payment, and administrative conditions.
- Individual plans identify needs, goals, preferences, and expected supports.
- Employers and service providers organize people, responsibilities, schedules, supervision, and work.
- Professional standards and guidance support competent and responsible practice.
- Records and audits show whether defined activities, requirements, or administrative processes occurred.

These sources can provide important evidence. But none of them automatically answers the complete quality question: Did the support service actually work for the person as intended?

4. What AMSI Means by a Quality Standard

An AMSI standard is a voluntary shared reference for examining support-service quality in a clear, consistent, and responsible way.

It helps the reader connect practical questions:

- What support was expected?
- What work was actually performed?
- What result occurred?
- What conditions affected the service?
- What evidence supports the conclusion?
- What can responsibly be said about the quality of the service?

AMSI standards are not laws, licenses, funding rules, clinical instructions, or automatic certification schemes. They do not replace professional judgment, individual plans, employer responsibilities, program requirements, or legal duties.

5. The Support Service Is Considered as a Whole

A support service is more than one task or one worker.

It brings together the person receiving support, the people providing support, the work performed, the result, the service period, responsibilities, conditions, context, and available evidence.

In AMSI, this complete defined service is treated as the Support-Service Quality Object.

The formal term expresses a simple idea: before judging quality, everyone should be clear about what service, person, period, conditions, and result are actually being examined.

6. Why Support Services Need Their Own Quality Standards

Support services are different from ordinary products. They are realized through people, relationships, judgment, communication, changing needs, and real-life conditions.

The same activity may work well for one person and poorly for another. The same plan may produce different results in a home, workplace, school, program, or community setting.

Because of this variation, support-service quality cannot be reduced to a checklist, satisfaction score, billing record, completed task, or absence of a complaint.

It must be understood in relation to the person, the intended support, the way the service was provided, the conditions in which it occurred, and the result that actually happened.

7. Evidence Matters

A responsible quality conclusion must be supported by evidence.

Evidence may include direct observation, the person's experience and communication, records, work results, schedules, plans, assessments, incident information, worker observations, third-party information, and other relevant sources.

The important question is not simply whether paperwork exists. The question is whether the available information is sufficient and reliable enough to understand what actually happened.

Missing, conflicting, or uncertain information should remain visible. It should not automatically be treated as proof that the service was satisfactory.

8. A Quality Conclusion Does Not Have to Be Favorable

A responsible conclusion may be favorable, adverse, mixed, limited, or still uncertain.

AMSI does not require a positive answer. It requires a conclusion that is supported by the service actually examined and does not extend beyond the available evidence.

Good intentions, completed paperwork, authorized hours, or one favorable sign do not by themselves establish the quality of the whole service.

9. Where to Continue

This article is the starting point. Readers do not need to learn the entire methodology before understanding the central idea.

A simple reading path is:

1. Use this article to understand why support-service quality needs its own system of examination.
2. Use the Support-Service Quality Vocabulary when the governing terms need clarification.
3. Use Whole Quality in Support Services for the broader support-service framework.
4. Use the Occupational Reference Framework when work, occupations, roles, and responsibilities need to be understood.
5. Use the applicable AMSI Core Standard for the invariant quality factors and indicators of the support-service domain.
6. Use an applicable Context Guide for context-specific interpretation and Quality Outcome Criteria.

The central idea remains simple:

Support-service quality should be judged by whether the service truly worked for the person, not simply by whether an activity was authorized, completed, funded, or recorded.

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