
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Disability Determination Services (DDS) works with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to determine a person's eligibility for disability benefits. These eligibility determinations are based on medical and vocational criteria established by SSA for nationwide use.

DDS is administered through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, under the Office of Adult Learning and Rehabilitation Services, as authorized by federal law and regulations.

Eligibility determinations are made for adults and children. Determinations are made based on evidence such as medical reports from physicians and other sources. If additional information is needed, DDS may purchase examinations from the medical community.

Applications for disability benefits are initiated at Social Security field offices located throughout Missouri. A Social Security representative obtains basic information from the person applying for benefits (nature of the impairment, when it became disabling, names of physicians and hospitals administering treatment). Social Security evaluates the nonmedical requirements (years of work credit, income and resources, work activity).

If the nonmedical criteria are met, SSA sends the application to DDS.

At the DDS office, the case is assigned to a counselor who is responsible for appropriately developing the issues in the claim. A team consisting of a counselor and a physician, psychologist or speech language pathologist (SLP) determines whether the claimant is medically entitled to disability benefits.

Case assignments are made according to Missouri's geographic areas. DDS counselors retain individual responsibility for the cases they are assigned.

COUNSELOR SKILLS

Strong organizational skills

A successful DDS counselor must have strong organizational skills. The counselor must obtain medical and vocational information that provides a clear description of the medical impairment and how that impairment affects a claimant's ability to function. This requires the counselor to contact physicians, hospitals, former employers and other sources.

Adept scheduling skills

When available medical evidence is insufficient, the DDS counselor is responsible for arranging an appropriate medical examination to obtain the required evidence.

Ability to learn pertinent laws, regulations and policies

The DDS counselor must be knowledgeable of the laws, regulations and policies governing Social Security Disability.

Ability to develop sufficient medical knowledge

The DDS counselor must be able to interpret medical findings and consult with agency medical specialists to determine impairment severity.

Ability to soundly assess the relevancy of vocational factors

The DDS counselor must be able to determine how vocational factors (age, education, work background) and medical restrictions impact a claimant's ability to work.

Ability to adhere at all times to strict policies of confidentiality and due process of law

Policies for both confidentiality and due process of law, which the DDS counselor must follow, are clearly stated in federal regulations.

Meticulous approach to ensure fair and equal treatment to all claimants

Under established law and policies, DDS counselors must treat all claimants fairly and equally.

Concise written communication

The DDS counselor's analysis and decision regarding a claimant's disability or impairment severity must be clearly documented.

Proper verbal communication

The DDS counselor must be able to communicate in a tactful and organized manner when contacting physicians, hospital personnel, former employers, claimants and other sources for information.

Competent computer skills

The DDS counselor must possess strong computer skills as all casework is performed in an electronic environment.

COUNSELOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- Obtaining information to be used as evidence in determining eligibility for disability benefits – This information includes a claimant’s medical records, work history and reports of daily activities. These contacts are primarily made by letter and telephone. Additional contacts might be in person, requiring interpersonal interviewing skills.
- Working with a staff physician, psychologist or SLP to analyze evidence when necessary
- Comparing medical evidence and vocational evidence with established criteria
- Writing a clear, concise disability determination that demonstrates a thorough analysis of the facts and findings of the case

COUNSELOR TRAINING

A new DDS counselor receives specific training in the areas of:

- policy.
- regulations.
- medical terminology.
- medical conditions and the restrictions they might cause.
- vocational factors.
- case development.
- case analysis.
- sequential evaluation.
- due process.

Initial basic training lasts for approximately 12 weeks. On-the-job training continues until proficiency is attained, which is usually within one year.

OUR MISSION

People Helping People

DDS is committed to providing quality services to people applying for Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income benefits.

We are committed to providing our claimants:

- courtesy and respect.
- accurate and timely determinations.
- the opportunity to participate in the claims process.
- an explanation regarding the recommended outcome of the claim.
- information regarding appeal rights and appropriate referrals.



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