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## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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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 and applied to disability applications nationwide.

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. At times, DDS purchases examinations from the medical community.

Applications for disability benefits are initiated online at [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) or at Social Security field offices located throughout Missouri. A Social Security representative obtains basic information from the individual applying for benefits (nature of the impairment, when it became disabling and prevented work activity, 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.

DDS counselors retain individual responsibility for the cases they are assigned.

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## COUNSELOR SKILLS

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### **Strong organizational skills**

A successful DDS counselor has strong organizational skills. The counselor obtains 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 learns the laws, regulations and policies governing Social Security Disability.

### **Ability to develop sufficient medical knowledge**

The DDS counselor interprets medical findings and consults with agency medical specialists to determine impairment severity.

### **Ability to soundly assess the relevancy of vocational factors**

The DDS counselor determines 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 are clearly stated in federal regulations.

### **Ensure fair and equal treatment to all claimants**

Under established law and policies, a DDS counselor treats 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**

Positive and professional communication is required when contacting physicians, hospital personnel, former employers, claimants and other information sources.

### **Competent computer skills**

Strong computer skills are necessary as all casework is performed in an electronic environment.

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## COUNSELOR RESPONSIBILITIES

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- 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. Claimant contact is primarily by letter and telephone. Occasional contact might be face-to-face, 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 shows a thorough analysis of the facts and findings of the case

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## COUNSELOR TRAINING

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

- Policy
- Regulations
- Medical terminology
- Medical conditions and related restrictions
- Vocational factors
- Case development
- Case analysis
- Sequential evaluation
- Due process

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

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## OUR MISSION

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### The Right Decision at the Right Time

DDS is committed to offering quality services to people applying for Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income benefits by providing the following to all 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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