

Disability Evaluation Services



Disability Evaluation Services (DES) is administered through Commonwealth Medicine, the public service consulting division of the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Commonwealth Medicine helps public agencies improve their health care policies and services through innovative consulting and service models by applying the knowledge and resources of the Medical School.

What We Do

In Massachusetts, people with disabilities are eligible for various forms of public assistance, such as Medicaid and monetary and medical assistance, depending on the nature and severity of their disabling condition. It can sometimes be intimidating and confusing for people with disabilities to determine what benefits they may be eligible for, and how to negotiate the pathways to obtain benefits – particularly if that person has a learning disability or if English is not their first language.

Disability Evaluation Services (DES) offers a streamlined, consolidated disability review process for its state agency partners, including Massachusetts Medicaid (MassHealth) and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). This program, administered by the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division, assists state agencies in determining eligibility for public benefits by providing qualitative, cost-effective, timely and comprehensive disability determinations.

Our Services

The determination process begins with a universal disability application, providing applicants with a single point of entry into the system. The DES disability review process develops a complete disability record for each applicant, including medical evidence from the applicant's own treating sources as well as purchased consultative examinations if needed. DES clinical and certified vocational staff then apply Title XVI Supplemental Security Income (SSI) federal rules and other applicable state rules to determine disability for monetary and medical assistance. For example, in Massachusetts, the SSI federal rules determine the disability for MassHealth, and the DTA Code of Massachusetts Regulations determines the disability for Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC) and Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC).

The end result is a Consolidated Disability Determination, a hierarchical decision-making process providing state agencies with multiple disability determinations, individualized for every agency (in Massachusetts, for MassHealth, EAEDC and TAFDC) to which an individual is applying for disability-based benefits.

DES also supports its state agency partners by providing a formal appeals process, and expert telephonic testimony for all disability determinations that are appealed. This gives full due process to individuals determined not to be disabled, including an explanation of the reason(s) their claim was denied. DES routinely provides status reports to its agency clients, allowing tracking of the program, its outcomes and its effectiveness in meeting customer goals.

Federal Guidelines

DES clinical staff utilize Title XVI Supplemental Security Income (SSI) federal rules to determine disability for MassHealth, and the Code of Massachusetts Regulations to determine the disability for EAEDC (Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children) and/or TAFDC (Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children).

Program Benefits

DES works to meet each state agency's specific need, always ensuring compliance with state and federal policies and regulations, including HIPAA. DES provides:

- Highly qualified, licensed clinical staff with extensive medical, psychological and vocational expertise
- Services that leverage DES systems and clinical expertise to improve the efficiency and accuracy of disability determinations
- Collaborative program development to meet the unique needs of client agencies
- Support ranging from basic operational systems through more elaborate programs integrated across agencies
- Ongoing programs to monitor and improve administrative efficiency
- Continuous improvement of operational processes through data collection and analysis systems
- Access to informed policy and data analysis on proposed federal and state regulations and new initiatives

Results

DES, in collaboration with MassHealth and DTA, developed a consolidated disability determination evaluation process which provides Massachusetts with more comprehensive data on the disabled population than ever before. The program has grown substantially since its inception, processing more than 46,000 cases through this method in 2006.

DES also has the flexibility to quickly respond to new agency initiatives, including placing DES staff onsite in selected DTA offices for short term in-person disability evaluation and work engagement, and expediting MassHealth reviews for clients such as Boston Health Care for the Homeless and the Massachusetts Department of Correction. Additionally, state agency partners have utilized DES disability review expertise to assist them in developing Medicaid waiver requests and proposed DTA regulation changes.

Why Choose Us?

As part of the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division, DES is supported by the academic, policy, research and clinical resources of one of the nation's leading academic medical institutions. The Medical School and DES share a mission to improve health outcomes for those served by public health and human service programs. Because DES is a public entity, we bring a unique understanding to the challenges faced by public health agencies.



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