

**SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS AND CO-OCCURRING IMPAIRMENTS**  
**Impact on Disability Determination for SSI/SSDI**

**Who is not eligible:** People whose substance use (drug abuse or alcoholism “DAA”) is deemed *material* to their disability are ineligible for SSI/SSDI. DAA is “*material*” only when the evidence establishes that the individual would not be disabled if s/he stopped using drugs or alcohol.

**Who is eligible:** People with impairments that would remain severe if they discontinued substance use may qualify for SSI/SSDI.

**Determination Process:**

1. There is an initial determination of disability using the 5 step sequential analysis and taking into account all of claimant’s limitations regardless of whether related to substance abuse.
2. If there is medical evidence of substance abuse, SSA must determine whether DAA is a contributing factor material to the determination of disability.
  - a. Medical evidence of substance abuse: evidence from an acceptable medical source and that is sufficient and appropriate to establish that the individual has a “medically determinable substance use disorder”.
  - b. Medically determinable substance use disorders are medical conditions described as “substance dependence” and “substance abuse” disorders in the DSM-IV—conditions in which the individual maladaptive pattern of substance use leads to clinically significant impairment or distress—not including medical conditions that arise from a mother’s use of alcohol or drugs during pregnancy.
3. Next, SSA determines whether DAA is a contributing factor material to a determination of disability. In other words, SSA evaluates which medical impairments and resulting limitations would remain if claimant stopped using drugs or alcohol and then determines whether any or all of the claimant’s limitations would be disabling.
  - i. If remaining limitations would not be disabling, SSA will find DAA is a contributing factor material to determination of disability and claimant is NOT ELIGIBLE;
  - ii. If SSA determines that claimant’s remaining limitations are disabling, claimant is disabled independent of DAA and SSA will find that DAA is not a contributing factor material to the determination of disability.

**KEY FACTOR: whether claimant would still be disabled if he/she stopped using DAA.**

Prepared by Lisa Parsons, Attorney Coordinator, SSI Outreach Project, lparsons@hdadvocates.org. (For more information See Documenting Disability for Persons with Substance Use Disorders & Co-Occurring Impairments: A Guide for Clinicians, National Health Care for the Homeless Council (January 2007). Available at: <http://www.nhchc.org/DAAguide.pdf>.)