

The *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act*



What is the *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights*?

The *Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act* (DD Act) is a federal law in the United States that provides funding and support to individuals with developmental disabilities. It was originally enacted in 1970 and has been reauthorized multiple times, most recently in 2014.

The DD Act aims to promote and protect the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities and enhance their opportunities for independence, productivity, and community inclusion. It supports various programs and initiatives that focus on advocacy, research, training, and the provision of services.

Key provisions and components of the DD Act include:

- **Protection and Advocacy Systems:** The law establishes Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Systems in each state and U.S. territory. These systems provide legal advocacy and representation to individuals with developmental disabilities, ensuring their rights are safeguarded.
- **State Councils on Developmental Disabilities:** The DD Act requires the establishment of State Councils on Developmental Disabilities in each state and territory. These councils are composed of individuals with disabilities, family members, advocates, and professionals. They work to identify the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and promote policies and initiatives to address those needs.
- **University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service:** The DD Act supports the establishment of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs) at universities or other organizations. UCEDDs engage in research, education, and service activities aimed at improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities.

- **Grants and Funding:** The DD Act provides funding to states, territories, and eligible entities to support a range of services and programs for individuals with developmental disabilities. These funds can be used for activities such as early intervention, community-based services, employment support, and housing assistance.
- **Protection of Rights and Self-Determination:** The DD Act emphasizes the importance of self-determination and encourages the provision of services and supports that enable individuals with developmental disabilities to make informed choices and have control over their own lives.

The DD Act is intended to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities have access to the resources, services, and supports they need to live full and meaningful lives within their communities. It aims to promote their rights, enhance their independence, and empower them to participate in all aspects of society.

How are developmental disabilities defined in the DD Act?

In the DD Act, the term "developmental disabilities" is defined in the act as follows:

"(A) General Definition: The term 'developmental disability' means a severe, chronic disability of an individual that: (i) is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments; (ii) is manifested before the individual attains age 22; (iii) is likely to continue indefinitely; (iv) results in substantial functional limitations in 3 or more of the following areas of major life activity: (I) self-care; (II) receptive and expressive language; (III) learning; (IV) mobility; (V) self-direction; (VI) capacity for independent living; (VII) economic self-sufficiency; and (v) reflects the individual's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, individualized supports, or other forms of assistance that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated."

In simpler terms, the DD Act defines a developmental disability as a significant and long-lasting disability that affects an individual's mental or physical functioning and has its onset before the age of 22. The disability results in substantial limitations in three or more areas of major life activities, and the person requires a combination of specialized services, supports, or assistance throughout their life to address their specific needs. The areas of major life activity include self-care, language, learning, mobility, self-direction, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

