

Who qualifies for services? DD definitions

There are different definitions for developmental disability (DD) but in general:

- It is a severe, chronic disability that originates during childhood
- Is attributable to a mental or physical impairment, or combination
- Is likely to continue indefinitely
- Results in substantial functional limitations

The federal government defines it in the **Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000**, and each state defines it for purposes of determining who is **eligible for Medicaid long-term services**. Washington's definition is more restrictive, meaning people who live here may not get services that they would in other states.

Key differences between federal and Washington law:

- Disabilities must manifest by age 22 in federal law, and by age 18 in Washington law
- Federal law requires functional limitations in three or more areas: self-care; receptive and expressive language; learning; mobility; self-direction; capacity for independent living; and economic self-sufficiency. It doesn't require impairments in adaptive and cognitive functioning
- Washington's administrative code requires significant impairments in *both* cognitive (reasoning, learning, and problem solving) and adaptive (social and practical) skills for some diagnoses (autism) but not others
- Using the federal definition, the prevalence rate is 1.58 percent

The **Centers for Disease Control** (CDC) defines developmental disabilities as a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. The prevalence rate for this definition is 17 percent.

WHAT THIS MEANS: Policy makers cannot assume someone who identifies as having a developmental disability can access services. The federal DD Bill of Rights Act winnows CDC's 17 percent prevalence rate down to 1.58 percent, and Washington's code winnows it even further. Even people with significant functional limitations may be ineligible for long-term supports through our state's Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA).

It also means services such as job development, transit and housing support must be accessible to people with sometimes significant limitations in areas like problem solving, communication and practical life skills. **Policy makers cannot assume supports are in place or available.**

Revised Code of Washington

The term "developmental disability" as used in this title means a disability attributable to intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or another neurological condition closely related to an intellectual disability or to require treatment similar to that required for persons with intellectual disabilities, which disability originates before such individual attains age eighteen, which has continued or can be expected to continue indefinitely, and which constitutes a substantial limitation to such individual.

In its administrative code, Washington further narrows who qualifies, depending on the diagnosis. Many people with autism, for instance, do not qualify for DDA services.

