

Frequently Asked Questions About Eligibility Designations for Individuals who may Have a Serious Mental Illness

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Q1: What is an SMI designation?

A1: This designation is for adults ages 18 and older. SMI eligibility assessments and designations are available to all individuals regardless of AHCCCS eligibility. A co-occurring substance use disorder does not automatically disqualify a person from receiving a SMI evaluation and/ or designation. For more information on this process, please see [Navigating the Public Behavioral Health System with a Serious Mental Illness Designation](#).

Q2: What is the SMI designation process?

A2: The SMI designation is the process individuals go through to receive an SMI designation. An individual can request to be evaluated/considered for services through:

- Their provider,
- An AHCCCS health plan,
- A Tribal Regional Behavioral Health Authority (TRBHA),
- The Arizona Department of Corrections Rehabilitation and Reentry (ADOCRR),
- The Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections (ADJC), or
- Solari Crisis & Human Services.

Members who are already receiving services from an AHCCCS provider may ask their provider to submit an application for SMI services.

Q3: What is the benefit of an SMI designation?

A3: With an SMI designation, an individual who is 18 years or older has access to services that may help improve quality of life and the ability to live independently. SMI is a designation not a diagnosis.

AHCCCS is committed to ensuring the availability of timely, quality health care. If you know of an AHCCCS member who is unable to access health services, or if you have a concern about the quality of care, please call your AHCCCS health care plan's Member Services number. If your concern is not resolved, please call AHCCCS Clinical Resolution Unit at 602-364-4558, or 1-800-867-5308.

Q4: What should I expect throughout the process?

A4: You will be required to submit documentation of your mental illness and how it is affecting your quality of life. It is possible that you will be required to meet with a clinician in person to complete an assessment. You will receive an approval or denial within seven days. If you are denied, you will receive a letter explaining the reason. You have the option to appeal this process.

Q5: If I disagree with the outcome of the eligibility designation what can I do? What is the Grievance and Appeals process?

A5: Each applicant has the right to appeal their SMI eligibility designation. If there is an appeal, the vendor will make the second decision within three, 20, or 60 days, depending on the need for more information. The vendor will send a written notice to the individual with the final decision of the appeal. If the individual wishes to appeal the second decision, they have the right to ask for an administrative hearing. To learn more about the appeal process please see the [Appeals Process for Individuals with an SMI Designation](#)

A formal process exists for member grievances and appeals including Serious Mental Illness (SMI) grievances and appeals and also provider claim disputes. The Grievance and Appeal system provides access to the State fair hearing process. For more information on this process, please see [How to File an Appeal](#).

Q6: How do you request an evaluation for an SMI designation?

A6: AHCCCS contracts with a single statewide entity that reviews eligibility and makes a designation of whether an individual meets the functional and diagnostic criteria for the SMI designation. A member may request an initial SMI designation assessment at any time. An SMI designation assessment may be requested every six months.

Q7: Will having an SMI designation prevent me from enlisting in the military?

A7: All military applicants are required to disclose a full medical history including a mental health history. To learn more, please refer to Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 6130.03, Volume 1 Medical Standards for Military Service: Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction Section 5.28 for a comprehensive list of disqualifying mental health conditions and factors. A person who is found to have a disqualifying mental health condition may seek a medical enlistment waiver. However, obtaining a waiver is not automatic and approval is determined on a case-by-case basis. 32 CFR § 66.7(a)(1).

Q8: How are Medicare and Medicaid behavioral health benefits coordinated for a Non-Title 19 ACC-RBHA individual who is not eligible for full Medicaid (Title 19) benefits, but is eligible for Medicare?

A8: Eligibility differs between Medicaid and Medicare. Medicaid recipients can contact their provider to learn about available services. Non-Title XIX Medicaid members can contact the Clinical Teams, RBHA, or TRBHA for any grants or options available for services.

For a Non-Title XIX ACC-RBHA member with Medicare benefits, Medicare is the primary payer for inpatient and outpatient Medicare-covered behavioral health services. Medicare-covered behavioral health services that exceed Medicare's coverage limits, and non-covered Medicare services, may be covered by the Non-Title XIX ACC-RBHA plan. Work with your providers or your ACC-RBHA or TRBHA clinical care team (case manager) to coordinate your covered behavioral health services and arrange for any additional available financial assistance. See also AHCCCS AMPM Policy 320-T2: Non-Title XIX/XXI Services and Funding (Excluding Block Grants and Discretionary Grants).

Q9: Who can make a referral for a member to receive an evaluation for an SMI designation?

A9: An individual, their Healthcare Decision Maker (HCDM), and/or a member of the individual's clinical team can make a referral for evaluation of SMI designation.

Q10: Will an SMI designation take up to 60 days?

A10: Solari makes SMI designation decisions within a three-day timeline, if no other circumstances occur, such as the need for more documentation, a resulting appeals process, or a time extension requested by the member or their health care decision maker.

Q11: If a child has an SED designation, will it automatically become an SMI designation when a child turns 18 years old?

A11: An SED designation does not automatically become an SMI designation when a child turns 18 years old. A child is eligible to receive an SMI designation at age 17 years and 6 months of age. The requirements for the SED and SMI designations may vary/change depending on the individual and as such, each individual member must receive separate SED and SMI designations.

Q12: What if a member does not need/want an SMI designation anymore?

A12: An SMI designation remains in place until the member or their legal guardian requests to have it removed. The person requesting removal could be the member, the member's HCDM, or someone from the member's clinical team. If the member or their HCDM does not agree with an SMI designation, the member or HCDM can ask for an assessment to see whether the member still meets criteria for an SMI designation. When a removal of designation is requested, the member's primary care provider (PCP) or their established behavioral health provider will send the required documentation to the vendor for evaluation. This process, called "removal of the SMI designation," is implemented when the member no longer meets the criteria for an SMI designation. This will result in a change to the member's behavioral health category from Serious Mental Illness to General Mental Health. The SMI Eligibility designation vendor will also send out result notifications to the member and their HCDMs (if applicable) and be available to address any questions and/or provide technical assistance as needed about the removal of the SMI designation process. An SMI designation lasts until a person is reassessed and determined to no longer meet criteria.