

Medical/Mental Health Diagnoses & Special Education Eligibility

Technical Support Paper

Medical diagnoses are important pieces of information in the process whereby teams determine if a child has a disability. As part of the evaluation/reevaluation for special education, the team must review existing data, including evaluations and information provided by the parents of the child. However, while a medical diagnosis is important information for teams to consider, and may be enough to create a suspicion that a child has a disability, the diagnosis itself is never enough to determine eligibility for special education.

First, the law specifies that an eligibility determination may not be made on a single piece of information (34 CFR § 300.304(b)(2)). Medical diagnosis alone does not answer all the questions necessary to determine special education eligibility. For example, while a medical diagnosis may identify a condition, it does not necessarily address "adverse effect on educational performance" or the need for special education.

Second, teams, which must include parents, make eligibility decisions. Individual educational professionals or outside providers (physicians, therapists, etc.) cannot make eligibility decisions (34 CFR § 300.305(a)(1)).

It is important to recognize that there are differences between special education eligibility and how the medical/private provision of services work. These differences can create confusion and distrust for families who are seeking special education evaluation. For example, a parent, with a child diagnosed with ADHD, may seek an Individual Education Plan, after being told to do so by the child's physician. However, when the parent requests the IEP, the school instead indicates that they need to complete their own special education evaluation to determine eligibility first. This action appears to be against the physician's recommendations even though it is the legally required action when a disability is suspected. While all parties have the child's best interest in mind, confusion regarding differing requirements creates frustration and distrust. As part of a full and individual evaluation, it is important to seek information from families and for the evaluation team to review information from private providers in light of the learner's unique circumstances. For additional information, see Standards 3 and 6 of [Iowa's Eligibility & Evaluation Standards](#).