

Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) Determination Process

What is a Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)?

Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) is a designation for children who have a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder which substantially interferes with or limits the child's ability to function in family, school, or community activities. It may identify higher needs and help AHCCCS match services to the member's specific needs.

There is a standard process for determining SED eligibility.

What are the criteria?

In order to receive an SED determination a child must:

- Be under age 18 years old,
- Have a qualifying diagnosis, and
- Have serious impairment due to the symptoms of their diagnosis, or be at risk of deterioration if adequate supports and services are not provided.



What is the benefit of an SED designation?

Children with an SED designation qualify for all AHCCCS-covered behavioral and physical health services, as well as a higher level of care to include additional services based on their needs. These may include crisis intervention services, Traditional Healing Services, Auricular Acupuncture, or room and board when a Behavioral Health Residential Facility admission is medically necessary. Members with an SED designation may receive services through the Mental Health Block Grant even if they are not eligible for Medicaid coverage for example, over income covered under other insurance, or have no insurance coverage). A member has the right to discuss with their provider which services best fit their needs.

What to expect during the designation process?

The parent/guardian, known as the Health Care Decision Maker (HCDM), may call their child's primary care provider (PCP), their established behavioral health provider, their health plan (AHCCCS or commercial/private insurer), or the child's school to request an SED eligibility determination. If the child is uninsured/underinsured, the HCDM can contact the local [AHCCCS Complete Care-Regional Behavioral Health Agreement](#) (ACC-RBHAs) and request an evaluation appointment. The HCDM and their child will meet with a qualified assessor within seven days of request. Once the packet is completed and consent is given, Solari Eligibility and Care Services reviews the packet and makes a decision. The SED designation process may take up to 60 days. Once the decision has been made, Solari notifies the HCDM, submitting provider, and AHCCCS. If the child is already covered by AHCCCS, they may stay with their existing health plan. If they do not have AHCCCS, their services will be covered by the ACC-RBHA in their area.

Will an SED designation automatically become a Serious Mental Illness (SMI) determination when a child turns 18 years old?

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 evaluation](#) at age 17 years and 6 months of age. The SED and SMI determination processes are separate.

More information can be found in the [SED Determination FAQs](#) document.

The Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (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.