



Developmental disability is a broad term that applies to a permanent disability that impacts a person's intellectual or physical functioning. The disability is identified sometime before young adulthood. Sometimes developmental disabilities are visible, but oftentimes they are not. No two people with developmental disabilities are alike, as the severity and type of disability is different with each person. Examples of developmental disabilities include cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, and spina bifida, as well as intellectual disabilities, hearing loss, and visual impairment.

While some with developmental disabilities are fully independent and require no formal support services, others have disabilities



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that affect communication, movement or cognition, making formal supports necessary. Access to these support services is important if people with all types of developmental disabilities are to be fully included and able to participate in their communities.

HOW DO ARIZONA AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DEFINE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY?

Understanding how Arizona and the federal government define developmental disability is important in identifying available programs and resources. However, government programs and services often have additional eligibility requirements.

Arizona defines a developmental disability as:

1. Attributable to cognitive disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy or autism,
2. Occurs before the person is 18 years old,
3. is expected to last a lifetime, and
4. limits the person's activities in at least three of the following areas:
 - ability to care for oneself;
 - ability to comprehend or communicate;

- ability to learn;
- ability to move;
- ability to makes independent choices;
- ability to live independently; or
- ability to financially provide for him/herself.¹

Additionally, children under the age of 6 with significant developmental delays may be defined as having a developmental disability. By falling under Arizona's definition of developmental disabilities, a person may, in turn, qualify for state developmental disability services.

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 provides the federal definition of developmental disability. While it is similar to Arizona's definition, there are several notable differences:

1. Only those with cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism or a cognitive disability are covered by Arizona's law. Federal law includes other diagnosed disabilities.
2. A developmental disability must manifest itself before the person turns 18 according to Arizona's law; federal law extends the time period to 22 years old.²

Nearly all of the programs administered by the State or Arizona use the state definition. This definition is used, along with other criteria, to determine program eligibility.



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The Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council uses the federal definition when awarding its grant funds and other activities.

¹ From Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S. 36-551)

² From the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-402)