

How to choose a descriptor

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Introduction

A descriptor must be chosen for each of the ten daily living component activities of Adult Disability Payment (ADP) and for each of the two mobility component activities of ADP.

Each descriptor has a number of points allocated to it.

When choosing a descriptor a case manager must make consistent and fair decisions on the choice of descriptor for all individuals applying for ADP.

Identifying the individual's needs

The first step to choosing the correct descriptor is to clearly identify what the individual is telling us in their ADP application form and /or supporting information about their ability to perform the activity.

The descriptors within an activity generally relate to a specific ability or difficulty. For example throughout daily living component activity 1 the use of aids is most likely to relate to individuals who have a physical disability. The requirement for prompting would most likely apply to individuals with learning disabilities or mental health conditions. (See activities chapters for details of the descriptors.)

It is common for an individual applying for ADP to have a number of disabilities or health conditions.

An individual can experience a range of symptoms that are unique to their lived experience and can vary in both duration and severity.

Common symptoms may include but are not limited to:

- pain
- shortness of breath
- fatigue
- lack of motivation
- loss of consciousness

- confusion

A case manager should have a clear picture of the needs that an individual has. If this is unclear then the application form and supporting information should be reviewed to establish if further information is required.

Example showing how to identify a person's needs in relation to their mental health condition :

Stephen reports that due to his bipolar disorder he experiences low mood for seven months of the year and loses motivation to wash regularly. His partner has to persuade him to shower. Without this support he would not complete the activity.

In the above example we can identify that Stephen has a need for prompting in relation to this activity due to his mental health condition.

Example showing how to identify what the symptoms are that cause the individual's needs when there is one need relating to a mental health condition:

Stephen reports that due to his bipolar disorder he experiences low mood for seven months of the year and loses motivation to wash regularly. His partner has to persuade him to shower, without this support he would not complete the activity.

In the above example we have already identified that Stephen has needs relating to a mental health condition but we can take the next step and identify that his mental health condition leads to a lack of motivation. It is this lack of motivation that we will make a decision on.

Example showing how to identify an individual's needs in relation to their physical abilities:

Eli reports that following the loss of one of their legs in a car accident, while they are able to walk with a prosthetic leg, they are only able to walk twenty metres due to severe pain.

In the above example we can identify that Eli has needs relating to their physical abilities therefore we only have to consider the descriptors that relate to physical abilities.

Once the individual's needs are identified we need to establish:

- what the symptoms are that cause the individual's needs
- the severity of the symptoms
- the duration of the symptoms

How to identify what the symptoms are that cause the individual's needs when there is one need relating to physical abilities:

We have already identified that Eil has needs relating to physical abilities. We can now take the next step and identify that we will have to make a decision on their ability to walk with a prosthetic leg and their levels of pain.

Full worked example:

Heather's partner reports that she was diagnosed with severe autism at a young age and has a learning disability. Alongside this Heather has depression and epilepsy. Her family reports that she is unable to cook safely as she cannot follow the steps of a recipe due to her autism. Due to her depression and low mood which happens for about a month every six months the family have to motivate her to cook. When cooking she has to have a member of the family present as she has daily seizures that lead to her collapsing to the floor and losing consciousness. She has had incidents in the past where she has fallen and burned herself.

We begin by identifying the conditions that relate to Heather's needs:

- severe autism and a learning disability – cognitive conditions
- depression – mental health condition
- epilepsy – neurological condition

We then consider the severity and duration of her symptoms within these areas of challenge:

- severe autism and a learning disability – is unable to follow a recipe to cook, this is always present
- depression – lacks motivation to cook, this happens once for a month in every six months
- epilepsy – is unable to keep herself safe due to loss of consciousness, this risk is always present

The above symptoms, their severity and duration should be considered and explained when making a decision on the descriptors. By completing this step we can take what appears to be a highly complex situation and make it clear.

Considering the scope of the activity

Once we have established the needs of an individual, we need to apply the scope of the activity. This identifies which areas of the activity and reported ability are considered within the activity.

The scope allows us to filter out any details from an individual's application form or supporting information on how they complete the activity that are not covered in the activity.

Example showing how to consider the scope of the activity, using daily living component activity 5 (managing toilet needs or incontinence)

An individual writes in their application form: “I use a commode as I struggle to walk to the toilet, once at the commode I need help to pull my clothes down due to being unable to bend. My carer will then lower me to the toilet, and afterwards will clean me as I am unable to bend.”

Walking to the toilet and removing clothing is not in scope for daily living component activity 5. We should exclude these details from the decision. We make a decision on the requirement for help onto and off the toilet and the requirement for help to clean themselves.

Applying the reliability criteria

The reliability questions are 4 questions that should be applied to every decision. This ensures consistency in the decision-making approach.

The reliability criteria which must be adhered to for every client are:

- Safely
- Timely – within a reasonable time period
- Acceptable standard and
- Repeatedly

If an individual cannot complete an activity in the way described in a descriptor in accordance with the reliability criteria, then they should be considered unable to complete it at that level, and a higher descriptor should be considered appropriate.

Example showing how to apply the reliability criteria:

Gavin tells us that due to pain from his lumbago, he requires aids to enable him to get in and out of the shower. He states that he bathes four times a week and uses a long handled brush to wash his lower limbs as trying to bend makes his pain worse. By using the long handled brush he is able to wash all over. He reports that he does not have any safety issues when bathing.

The case manager considers descriptor B for daily living component activity 4 (washing and bathing) which is where an individual needs to use an aid or appliance to be able to wash or bathe. This is because the above statement meets the requirements for:

- safety (no reported safety issues)
- acceptable standard (he can wash all over with the use of an aid)
- repeatedly (he is able to bathe four times a week).

However he goes on to describe that it takes him around 40 minutes to bathe due to having to move slowly because of his pain levels. The case manager decides that Gavin no longer meets the “timely – within a reasonable time period” reliability standard so a higher descriptor needs to be considered.

Probability

In some cases there may be sufficient information on the majority of activities, but small gaps on some activities that it has not been possible to fill by obtaining further evidence or by contacting the individual. A case manager will be able to determine if there are gaps in the information they need by considering the eligibility criteria and the descriptors.

Where there are gaps in information in this way, the case manager can consider whether, based on the information that they have, on the balance of probabilities, it is likely that other facts also apply to the client. If looking to fill gaps in the information in this way, the case manager should consider:

- the disability or condition
- the treatment (if relevant)
- the information they have about the individual's needs.

This information can be used to decide if, on balance, a certain fact is likely to apply to the client. A decision based on the 'balance of probabilities' means that it is more probable than not. In considering this we can ask 'is it more likely than not that this fact applies to the client?'

If looking to fill gaps in the facts for the client in this way, using the balance of probabilities, the case manager should record the detail of this and the evidence they have used to reach their conclusion in their justifications.

There will also be a role for an assessment of the balance of probability when choosing which descriptor applies to the client. The descriptor which is chosen for the client for a given day must be the one which the client is considered to satisfy in terms of the reliability criteria. If it is possible that multiple descriptors may meet this criteria on a given day, an assessment will need to be made on the balance of probabilities, which is the most likely to apply. Again, the case manager should record the detail of this and the evidence they have used to reach their conclusion in their justifications.

Example showing how to apply the balance of probabilities:

Anna has Parkinson's disease and reports that she is able to take her medication unaided. However supporting information and medical knowledge indicate that due to her tremor she would not be able to manage without the use of an aid. There is a conflict between the individual's report and the other available information .

The case manager reviews this information against daily living component activity 3 (managing therapy or monitoring a health condition). They consider whether the information satisfies descriptor A (ii) can manage medication or therapy or monitor a health condition unaided, or descriptor B (i) needs to use an aid or appliance to be able to manage medication.

The case manager can make a decision on the balance of probabilities to address the apparent conflict in information about Anna. It is more likely than not that the client's Parkinson's disease and related tremor is significant enough that despite Anna's report that she is not able to complete the activity unaided. Therefore descriptor B would be the correct descriptor.

Choosing a descriptor in reverse alphabetical order

One technique used when choosing a descriptor can be to work in reverse alphabetical order from the bottom of the descriptor table to the top.

For example in an activity that has descriptors A-E, a case manager could start at descriptor E and work backwards to descriptor A.

An individual may have more than one descriptor that applies to their level of needs, and the case manager should always choose the descriptor that awards the highest number of points.

Choosing a descriptor in reverse alphabetical order helps to ensure that the correct descriptor is chosen because the descriptor awarding the highest number of points is considered first.

Choosing a descriptor using a process of elimination

Another approach that can be useful is to apply a process of elimination to reduce descriptor choices.

We can work through each descriptor and eliminate any that we are certain do not apply. This often leaves only one or two choices of descriptor.

Example showing how to choose a descriptor using a process of elimination:

For daily living component activity 4 (washing and bathing) an individual states that they need help in the shower due to a restriction in movement in both legs. They need assistance to wash their lower half, but are able to wash their upper body. The supporting information provided leans towards the individual being able to use aids to wash their lower half, but this is all the information the case manager has.

Using this method we can work through the descriptors and eliminate any that we know are not applicable.

- Descriptor A is unlikely to apply as the supporting information confirms that the individual has a difficulty in completing the activity.
- Descriptor B may apply as the supporting information suggests the use of aids may be sufficient for the individual to complete the activity.
- Descriptor C is unlikely to apply as this relates to safety and no safety risk has been identified.

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- Descriptor D may apply as it relates to washing hair or body below waist, which has been reported by the individual.
- Descriptor E may apply as this descriptor relates to physical assistance and this is what the individual describes.
- Descriptor F is unlikely to apply as the individual reports that they only require help to wash the lower half of their body.
- Descriptor G is unlikely to apply as the individual reports that they are involved in washing themselves.

We have reduced the choice down to between three descriptors – descriptor B, descriptor D or descriptor E.

We can now use this method to focus our request for supporting information. We can ask for information from the person who is most likely to be involved in these aspects of the individual's care (ie. someone who assists the individual with washing and bathing).

Activity	Descriptors	Points
4. Washing and bathing	a. Can wash and bathe unaided.	0
	b. Needs to use an aid or appliance to be able to wash or bathe.	2
	c. Needs supervision or prompting to be able to wash or bathe.	2
	d. Needs assistance to be able to wash either their hair or body below the waist.	2
	e. Needs assistance to be able to get in or out of a bath or shower.	3
	f. Needs assistance to be able to wash their body between the shoulders and waist.	4
	g. Cannot wash and bathe at all and needs another person to wash their entire body.	8

End of chapter