

Understanding and interpreting supporting information

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Introduction

This chapter explains how supporting information is used:

- to build a picture of how an individual is impacted by their disability or condition and to support an individual's application or review.

It describes how a case manager can use supporting information to support the decision making process by:

- exploring any areas the individual has not informed Social Security Scotland about
- clarifying inconsistencies
- providing areas for further exploration within the decision making process.

In most cases one piece of supporting information from a professional is required. The case manager can make a determination without it if the individual has a good reason as to why this is not available.

Types of supporting information

There are two types of supporting information:

- supporting information from a professional (formerly formal supporting information)
- supporting information (formerly informal supporting information)

More detail can be found in the gathering supporting information section of the guidance.

Supporting information from a professional comes from a professional involved in an individual's treatment or care.

When applying for ADP, an individual, their appointee or representative must complete the application form. They must also provide supporting information that Social Security Scotland requires to make a determination on the application. Every individual applying is asked to provide one piece of supporting information from a professional to support their application, where possible.

Supporting information is not provided by a professional and can be from an individual's wider support network such as:

- family members
- friends
- unpaid carers.

This could include statements about the impact of the individual's disability or condition on their daily life. These sources of information are useful for:

- considering the information on the application form
- adding further detail to the supporting information from a professional that has been supplied with the application.

Supporting information can supplement the application form by describing the individual's daily living and mobility needs. Health and social care professionals may be able to confirm a diagnosis. However, they are less likely to be able to observe an individual's daily routine or mobility. Some allied health professionals like physiotherapists and occupational therapists can offer observations on this. However, not every individual will have had this type of input. Therefore people closely connected with an individual living with a disability or condition can provide useful information about the impact on their daily living and mobility needs.

Key principles in understanding and applying supporting information

When reviewing supporting information there are key points of information that a case manager may identify and use to make a determination on the application.

Date of the information

A case manager should check the date the supporting information is provided. They should consider:

- how current it is
- whether it is likely to be relevant to the individual's circumstances at the time of the application
- if it is from some time ago, the extent to which the impact of the individual's condition is likely to change over time.

Example when supporting information from more than two years ago may still be relevant:

An individual with a diagnosis of a long-term chronic condition may have supporting information from ten years ago that confirms diagnosis and functional ability. The case manager may use this supporting information to support their descriptor choice where it is clear that there is likely to be no improvement.

Example when supporting information from more than two years ago may not still be relevant:

A case manager may receive supporting information about an individual who has a diagnosis of a long-term mental health difficulty from three years ago. However as the particular mental health difficulty is known to fluctuate in how it affects the individual, this piece of supporting information may not be useful in coming to the correct descriptor choice. In this case further supporting information about the individual's current functional ability might be sought.

Confirming diagnosis

A case manager can use supporting information to confirm an individual's diagnosis. This could be either:

- directly when the diagnosis is identified from the supporting information received from the individual
- indirectly from the third party that has sent the supporting information. For example a letter is received from a consultant rheumatologist discussing joint degradation but does not reference the diagnosis directly. The individual states in their application that they have a diagnosis of arthritis so it is reasonable to infer that this confirms the diagnosis.

Defining an individual's functional ability

Similar to the confirming diagnosis section , some supporting information may directly reference an individual's functional ability.

For example a consultant psychiatrist's letter references an individual's difficulties with leaving the house due to severe anxiety.

Supporting information may indirectly reference an individual's functional ability where it describes general themes that could be applied to understand the individual's condition. For example, a physiotherapist may talk about restricted movement in the hips. This can be used to understand the functional ability of an individual who has told Social Security Scotland that they have trouble standing and walking.

When analysing functional ability a case manager should consider:

- What areas of daily living are likely to be affected by the condition(s) identified?
- Do the condition(s) identified in the supporting information align with their impact on the individual as reported in their application?
- Is the functional ability identified linkable to the condition(s) or symptoms the individual has told Social Security Scotland about in their application?

Symptoms

Supporting information giving more details of an individual's symptoms can confirm and explore their experienced symptoms. This could be directly, for example receiving a letter from a GP who outlines the reported symptoms.

A case manager could receive information in a letter from an occupational therapist giving details of how an individual is able to function in their home indirectly referencing the symptoms that affect the individual.

The supporting information may not directly reference the symptoms an individual describes. However, case managers can use the advice and guidance available to them to consider whether the symptoms are more likely than not given the individual's diagnosis. It is worth considering that each individual's experience of their symptoms can be different and the individual may have more than one symptom affecting them from the same condition.

When analysing symptoms a case manager should consider:

- Severity – the likely severity of the symptoms compared with the individual's stated levels of symptoms. It should be considered that each individual may experience symptoms differently. For example pain described as "mild" by a doctor could be experienced as "mild" by one individual and "significant" by another individual.
- Impact – what is the likely effect of living with the symptom as described or defined in the supporting information. It should be considered that each individual may experience the effects of symptoms differently, and may experience symptoms that are not usually experienced or which are not typical of their condition.
- Likely treatments - is the individual having appropriate treatments for the level of symptoms they are reporting. It should be considered that side effects or allergies experienced by an individual may have an impact on or prevent them from taking treatment that is considered appropriate.

Medical terminology

When analysing supporting information it is important that a case manager has a full understanding of any medical language or terminology. Without a full understanding of the language there may be a risk of an incorrect interpretation.

If information is contradictory for any of the above sections and this leads to uncertainty in making a decision, a case manager should explore the inconsistencies further.

This could be done by requesting further information, by speaking with the individual or asking for a consultation.

When satisfied that the decision can be made and justified in light of the inconsistency, then the justification supporting the case manager's decision should be recorded.

End of chapter