



## SMI Designation – Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What is a “SMI” (Serious Mental Illness) Designation?**

**A:** Serious Mental Illness, or “SMI,” is a label used in Arizona to identify people who need extra support because of their mental illness. A designation is **not a diagnosis** for treatment.

**Q: If my doctor says I have a serious mental illness, will I automatically be designated SMI?**

**A: No.** The SMI Designation is specifically designed for people who have additional difficulty in daily activities because of their mental disability. People who have been designated SMI are in need of long-term services to be able to live in their community.

**Q: How do I get designated SMI?**

**A: You** can ask for a SMI Designation **assessment** from a provider, or you can be **referred** for a SMI designation assessment. A SMI designation assessment is a meeting with a health professional to figure out if you should have an SMI designation.

**Q: Who do I contact to set up a SMI assessment?**

**A:** A **case manager** is the first person to contact concerning a SMI designation assessment. If you do not have a case manager or do not know who your case manager is, please contact member services for the Regional Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA) that represents your area:  
**Mercy Maricopa Integrated Care (Maricopa County):** 1-800- 564-5465  
**Cenpatico Integrated Care (Southern Arizona):** 1-866- 495-6738  
**Health Choice Integrated Care (Northern Arizona):** 1-800-640-2123

**Q: What do I need to qualify for a SMI designation?**

**A:** Your SMI assessment has to show 2 things for a person to get the SMI designation:  
**1. a qualifying diagnosis, AND**  
**2. a functional impairment.**

**Q: What is a qualifying diagnosis for the SMI designation?**

**A:** A qualifying diagnosis is **a disorder that makes someone eligible for an SMI designation.** The following types of mental illnesses qualify for SMI designation:  
• Psychotic Disorders, Bi-Polar Disorders or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder  
• Major Depression or Other Mood Disorders, Anxiety or Personality Disorders

**Q: What is a functional impairment for the SMI designation?**

**A:** A functional impairment means that **a person has difficulty in at least one** of the following areas:  
• living alone or with their family, without supervision;  
• risk of harming self or harming others;  
• has a hard time in school or work; or could get worse because of something else, like substance abuse



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**Q: Do I need an SMI designation to be eligible for health care or disability benefits?**

**A: No.** You **don't** need a SMI designation to be eligible for any of the following:

- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services
- AHCCCS, including specific services like case management and supportive housing
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits or Social Security Income (SSI)

**\*\*Eligibility for these services is based on other criteria.\*\***

**Q: What will a SMI designation do for me?**

**A:** People designated SMI may have access to some **mental health services**, even if they are not eligible for AHCCCS, including:

- ✓ standard medication,
- ✓ medication management,
- ✓ crisis services and
- ✓ additional services based on need. This may include peer support, case management, and limited transportation services.

**Q: How long will a SMI Designation last?**

**A:** If you have received a SMI designation based on the fact that you were a danger to yourself or others, the decision may be reviewed in as soon as 3 months. Otherwise SMI Designations generally last forever unless you request to have it removed.

**Q: How long will it take to get the results of my SMI Determination?**

**A:** You will have the results from the SMI determination within **20 days**.

**Q: How will I know if I have been denied a SMI designation?**

**A:** You will receive a letter in the mail called a “notice of action” or “notice of decision” from your RBHA that says you are not eligible for the SMI designation and a reason why.

**Q: Can I appeal the RBHA decision?**

**A: Yes.** You may appeal the decision with the RBHA directly.

- **First**, you must contact the RBHA in your area to record your appeal.
- If your appeal is denied, you may file a complaint with your RBHA.

*The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide general information to individuals regarding their rights and protections under the law. It is not intended as a substitute for legal advice. You may wish to contact the Arizona Center for Disability Law or consult with a lawyer in your community if you need further information.*

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Disability Status	AHCCCS (Medicaid) Status	
	<b>Non-Title XIX</b>	<b>Title XIX</b>
<b>General Mental Health (GMH)</b>	<p>Services: None</p> <p>Benefits: None</p> <p>Category: Not mentally ill enough to qualify for AHCCCS, but still may be eligible for other federal benefits (i.e. SSDI or Medicare)</p>	<p>Services: All services that are medically necessary</p> <p>Benefits: None</p> <p>Category: Qualified for AHCCCS, but not mentally ill enough to qualify for benefits from the Office of Human Rights (OHR)</p>
<b>Serious Mental Illness (SMI)</b>	<p>Services: Crisis, Medication, Medication management &amp; other TDB Services</p> <p>Benefits: Assistance from the Office of Human Rights (OHR)</p> <p>Category: Not qualified for AHCCCS despite disability, but qualified for limited mental health services and benefits from the Office of Human Rights (OHR) due to SMI designation</p>	<p>Services: All services that are medically necessary</p> <p>Benefits: Assistance from the Office of Human Rights (OHR)</p> <p>Category: Qualified for AHCCCS services and benefits from the Office of Human Rights (OHR).</p>