

Barriers to Care: Security Clearance — Mental Health Section Endorsement and Treatment-Seeking Concerns



Brief Security Clearance Overview

- A security clearance is an approval process which allows an individual access to classified national security information.
- Characteristics such as trustworthiness, reliability, and honesty are important factors in the process of obtaining a clearance.
- Security clearances are reinvestigated typically every 5-10 years.

Myth: Seeking, reporting, or receiving mental health treatment will negatively impact my ability to receive a security clearance.



Did you know that 24% of service members who reported mental health symptoms did not go for mental health treatment because they thought it would affect their security clearance?

Fact: It is extremely rare to have a security clearance denied or revoked solely on the basis of reporting mental health conditions or treatment.

Evidence: An analysis of security clearance adjudications over a six year period found that 85,000 people had their security clearances revoked or denied, and of those only 145 (0.002%) were denied due to mental health reasons alone.

Meadows et al., 2018; ES 2016-00751, 2016; DoD Adjudications, denials and revocations, CY2006-2012; Standard Form 86, 2016; Security Executive Agent Directive-4 (SEAD-4), 2017 | Released October 2020 by the Psychological Health Center of Excellence

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When must I answer “Yes” to Section 21?

In the November 2016 Standard Form 86 Revision, you must answer “Yes” if:



A court or administrative agency ever issued an order declaring you mentally incompetent or ordered you to consult with a mental health professional



You have ever been hospitalized for a mental health condition



You have ever been diagnosed by a provider with a serious condition such as schizophrenia, delusional disorder, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, or antisocial personality disorder



Per your own judgment: You have (or have had) a mental health or other health condition that substantially negatively affects your judgment, reliability, or trustworthiness



If I answer “Yes” to Section 21, what counts favorably?

- If the identified condition is readily controllable with treatment; and if in treatment, you are in compliance with the treatment plan
- If your mental health professional maintains that the identified condition occurred in the past and has been resolved or is in control/remission, there is a low probability of recurrence, and/or there are no indications of a current condition



Is mental health treatment encouraged?

Yes! The proactive management of mental health conditions is encouraged, and seeking or receiving mental health care for personal wellness and recovery may contribute favorably to decisions about eligibility.



What about my privacy?

Your mental health privacy is protected. Only the adjudicator has access to the information you report on the SF-86 form. Responses are not disclosed to your chain of command or health care providers.