

## How to Document a Brain Injury for Service Eligibility



Brain injury can be a misdiagnosed condition, especially when an injury occurred as a child, or is labeled as a “mild” injury. However, the impact of a traumatic brain injury (TBI) may mean someone requires support to live safely in the community of their choice.

It's not unusual for parents to provide round the clock care at home to a grown child who needs help after brain injury. But when the parents can't do it anymore and siblings have to step in, they need help. When there is no medical documentation of an injury, and eligibility for services depends on it, what do you do?

It's pretty common that people with brain injuries are seen well after the fact, and many time lack an assessment that was done at the time of the injury; one study found 42% of persons who stated they had experienced a TBI did not seek medical attention(1), and others show similar results.

### Documentation

Depending on the situation, it can be difficult to obtain medical documentation that a brain injury has occurred. When there are no medical records related to the injury that can be obtained, a structured in-depth interview can be utilized to establish a significant and credible history of TBI and document the impact most probably related to a TBI.

- Begin with a screening. There are many valid screening tests for TBI and they are available for no cost; here are a few:
  - [HELPS](#)
  - [Ohio State University TBI ID](#)
- Do a “Credible History” interview. This requires an interviewer to ask certain pointed questions multiple times and in a variety of ways to establish the details of any previous TBI(s). A template for this structured interview can be [found here](#).
- Gather up any documentation you might have that discusses the accident - newspaper articles of accident, emails, letters, etc. - when it happened, what happened, the time at the hospital, the problems after the injury. Look for old social media posts about it.
- Collect school records if applicable.
- Conduct and document family interviews to contrast the before and after the event
- Check to see if the individual has ‘disabled adult child’ benefits from the Social Security Administration (only possible if the individual was injured before 22 and the parent is disabled, deceased or retired).

Screening results and in-depth interview answers may not be enough to determine a TBI. Here are a few more things you might consider adding to your file to document a previous history of brain injury.

- Make an appointment with a physical medicine and rehabilitation physician (a Physiatrist) to conduct an examination; ask them to focus on the individual's medical condition, medications and independent living skills.
- Contact the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services to access trauma registry data to see if there is documentation of an occurrence of BI and the date it occurred.

- Have the physician order:
  - An MRI – either MR-based diffusion tensor imaging or a functional MRI
  - Occupational Therapy evaluation: to evaluate functional skills and level of independence with activities of daily living
  - Speech Language Pathology evaluation: to evaluate cognitive function
  - A Neuropsychological evaluation: may help establish a medical diagnosis. First, be sure to use someone with experience with brain injury. (There is nothing wrong with interviewing a potential service provider before arranging an appointment). Second, provide the testers with any relevant history you can think of, including medical, educational and employment records.

## Eligibility Interview

In addition to all the paperwork you have pulled together to take with you, it is important to remember a few things:

- For many programs, an eligibility interview will need to be conducted.
- The “level of care” needed determines if your application is accepted, so it is critical that you be painfully honest any/all skill deficiencies during your initial intake interview.
- Responses should focus on all of the things the individual CANNOT do, because those skill deficits will be the focus of the services you receive.
- Responses need to tell the story of what things are like on the worst days rather than paint a falsely sunny picture of the amount of assistance the individual requires.
- The person interviewing you will ask questions about the individual’s abilities in various types of self-sufficiency situations. It is important to go into the meeting having already considered responses regarding skill deficits in every aspect of the person’s lifestyle and daily routines.
- If the individual is an adult, they may be interviewed without a caregiver/family member present. Prepare the individual in advance for the questions, and discuss your participation in the interview. Let the interviewer know if they frequently overestimate their abilities.

**The Brain Injury Association of Virginia** can help you better understand brain injury and consult with you about your personal situation. We can then direct you to services in your area you might need. Our services are confidential and free.

Learn more on [biav.net](http://biav.net)

(1) Corrigan, J. and Bogner, J. (2007) Screening and Identification of TBI J Head Trauma Rehabil; Vol. 22, No. 6, pp. 315–317