



All About Job Disability Benefits for Hearing Loss

by Adam Dawson

Can an employee claim hearing loss as a "disability?" According to the Social Security Administration (SSA), there are circumstances that allow a person to be eligible for disability benefits without having to meet or match a "disability rating" covered in the SSA Blue Book. To decide if someone with hearing loss can still competently perform their duties, or the duties of any other job in the workforce, The SSA considers several factors. These include the person's age, educational background, and vocational history.

Should the SSA determine that hearing loss poses functional limitations on a person and is keeping them from working a job they would otherwise be qualified to perform, that person may be qualified to receive disability benefits to help meet medical

costs, monthly bills, and other expenses. This ruling, of course, is a result of an extensive and thorough review.

THE ADA RECOGNIZES HEARING LOSS AS A DISABILITY

Based on changes made by the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act of 2008 (ADAAA), a person with a hearing impairment is now officially considered to have a disability. As such, the ADA now covers in detail:

- When an employer may ask an applicant or employee questions about their hearing impairment and how it should treat voluntary disclosures;
- What types of reasonable accommodation employees with hearing disabilities may need;

- How an employer should handle safety concerns about applicants and employees with hearing disabilities; and
- How an employer can ensure that no employee is harassed because of a hearing disability or any other disability

It's crucial to understand that an employer may not legally ask questions about an applicant's medical condition or require an applicant to have a medical exam before a conditional job offer is made. This includes asking an applicant if they use a hearing aid, if they've had any medical procedures related to hearing, or if they have any condition that may have caused hearing loss.

As for the job applicant, the ADA does not require any individual to disclose that they have hearing impairment or any other disability. Once a job offer is made, however, an employer may ask questions about the applicant's health (including questions about the applicant's disability), and they may request a medical examination as long as all applicants for the same job are treated equally.

Furthermore, employers may also request that an employee goes through a medical exam if they know about a medical condition, or if they have observed performance problems and have reason to believe they are being caused by a medical condition. Additionally, an employer may ask an employee about hearing impairment when they

have reason to believe that the employee will be unable to safely perform essential job functions because of hearing loss.

Lastly, the ADA states that an employer may ask an employee about their hearing loss if this information is needed to approve an employee's request for accommodations needed to perform their job; to verify the use of sick leave related to the hearing impairment (only if the employer requires a doctor's note to verify use of sick time); or to enable the employee to participate in a voluntary wellness program sponsored by the employer.

It's important for employers to understand this information so they can avoid costly penalties and do their part to create a positive work environment for hearing impaired employees. Hearing at work is a struggle thousands of hearing-impaired people face on a daily basis. Employers need to comply with SSA and ADA rules to accommodate deaf workers and ensure they are treated fairly.

About the Author

Adam is the Digital Marketing Coordinator at e3 Diagnostics. His interest in hearing healthcare is driven by his passion for music because he feels everyone should be able to clearly listen to Pet Sounds at least once in their life. In his free time, he enjoys playing video games, digging through record stores for classic vinyl, shooting hoops, and writing stories.