



Medical and Social Disability – The Difference and Interconnection

Summary:

This guide explains the U.S. *medical* and *social* models of disability, their overlap, and how they affect benefits, employment, and independence for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). It calls for integrating both perspectives and updating Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) job definitions to reflect capacities with support.

Highlights:

- **Medical Model:** Defines disability as an impairment; used in SSA, DSM-5, ICD-11, and IDEA for benefits eligibility.
- **Social Model:** Focuses on environmental and attitudinal barriers; embedded in ADA and IDEA for inclusion.
- **Tension:** Benefits require medical certification, but real barriers are often social.
- **Employment Impact:** SSDI/SSI rules discourage work; gaps in employer readiness and vocational systems limit opportunities.
- **Family Factors:** Dependence on combined benefits can discourage independence; job coaches may face conflicting family and individual goals.
- **SOC Revisions:** Add ADA clause, update examples, and create crosswalk tools for IDD-friendly roles.
- **Solutions:** Redefine work incentives, develop consensus-based support standards, and strengthen family-centered planning.

Key Message:

True inclusion requires blending medical and social perspectives, addressing both clinical needs and societal barriers, and recognizing abilities with support in policy and job classification.

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