

Seeking mental health services does not affect one's ability to gain or hold clearance eligibility. Adjudicators regard seeking necessary mental health treatment as a positive step in the security clearance process.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SECURITY CLEARANCES

FIGHTING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

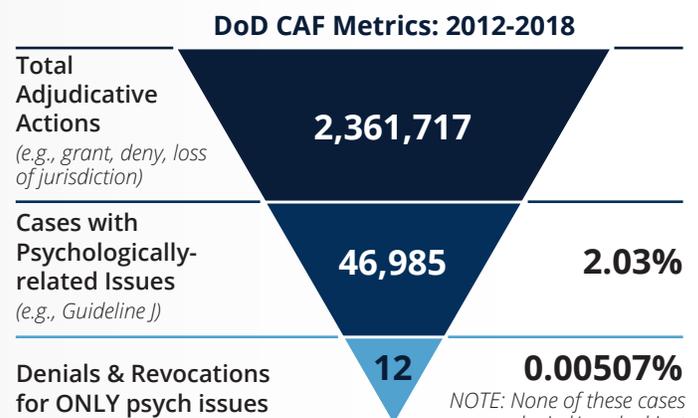
Research shows that stigmas related to mental health treatment have decreased in recent years. However, mental health stigma still remains a notable challenge, particularly among military members. A RAND study showed many service members do not regularly seek care for mental health symptoms due to reasons such as personal beliefs about self-reliance, concerns about how their supervisors and co-workers may react, and availability of mental health care. **But most importantly, cleared individuals fear seeking mental health care could adversely impact their security clearance eligibility. This is not the case.**

FACTS REGARDING CLEARANCES AND SEEKING CARE

A detailed analysis of denial and revocation statistics involving psychological conditions clearly demonstrates that **a cleared individual is not likely to lose or fail to gain clearance eligibility after seeking mental health care or experiencing mental health symptoms.**

Even for individuals with concerns in other adjudicative areas, the loss or failure to gain clearance eligibility was rare. During that same period, only 380 individuals with psychological concerns in addition to one or more other concerns had their eligibility revoked or denied. Of particular note, none of the cases resulting in a denial or revocation were based solely on an individual seeking mental health care. Rather, other factors, such as non-adherence to medical recommendations or simply not seeking care in the face of a clear need for mental health support, were generally the disqualifying issues.

It is important for the cleared workforce and prospective employees to understand that there are no automatically disqualifying conditions or treatments. For individuals suffering from psychological conditions, seeking and participating in a treatment plan helps demonstrate integrity and trustworthiness and may contribute favorably to decisions about eligibility. Avoiding care when needed, in contrast, can raise security concerns.



BOTTOM LINE: It is extremely rare for someone to lose a clearance for a psych issue standing alone.

RISKS FROM AVOIDING MENTAL HEALTH CARE

- **Decreased force readiness:** Untreated psychological conditions can increase other physical health issues, negatively impacting a cleared individual's ability to deploy or perform their job.
- **Increased suicide risks:** Mental health care is one of the primary protective factors against suicide.
- **Increased security concerns:** Performing sensitive national security duties while overly burdened by emotional issues could lead to impaired decision making and therefore pose a security risk.

For more information go to www.dcsa.mil/mc/pv/dod_caf/.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND SECURITY CLEARANCES FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will I lose or fail to gain a clearance just because I sought mental health care?

No. Seeking mental health care is a positive course of action and a sign of sound judgment. It is the most common way to mitigate mental health issues and is recognized as a positive step during the personnel vetting process.

What mental health issues do I need to report?

Initial clearance requests: Clearance candidates should follow current Standard Form 86 (SF-86) Section 21 guidance regarding reporting instructions. The issues of potential concern are:

- Legal findings of mental incompetence
- Court-ordered mental health care
- In-patient mental health care
- Certain diagnoses which, by their very nature, may impair judgment or reliability
- Self-appraised mental health concerns that could impact judgment or reliability

Cleared individuals: As with many reportable categories, significant changes to questionnaire responses mandate self-reporting to an individual's security manager or facility security officer. Actively cleared individuals who experience one of the examples cited above after completing their SF-86 are required to report the new information to their security office by filling out an SF-86C.

What mental health-related issues may raise security concerns?

An intentional lack of transparency in answering the questions in Section 21 or failing to report new information to your security office will raise significant security concerns; other potential security concerns generally include:

- Behaviors which may result in a threat to oneself or others
- Not seeking treatment when needed
- Non-compliance with recommended mental health treatment
- Involuntary psychiatric hospitalizations
- Co-occurring mental health issues and substance abuse issues
- Recurrent or chronic mental health concerns, which have not responded sufficiently to treatment

What happens if I answer "Yes" to Section 21 on my SF-86?

Investigators may request the opinion of your current or most recent health care professional to determine whether your condition possibly impacts your reliability, judgment, trustworthiness, and capacity to perform sensitive national security duties. Depending upon the nature of the concern, the investigator may request a summary of your medical records or hard copies of your medical records. In some cases, individuals may be asked to participate in an independent psychological evaluation with a government approved evaluator.

Are there some psychological conditions or treatments that would automatically disqualify an applicant from obtaining or maintaining clearance eligibility?

No. There are no automatically disqualifying conditions or treatments. National security professionals have demonstrated the ability to manage work effectively with appropriate treatment, even for conditions specified in Section 21. When necessary, seeking mental health care helps demonstrate integrity and trustworthiness and may contribute favorably to decisions about eligibility.