

# Disability Insurance: 3 Tips To Help Speed You Through Underwriting

Once you make the decision to protect your income with disability insurance, the next step is applying for your coverage. Because disability coverage is medically underwritten, your application must be approved by the insurance company before benefits can be put in force.

While the underwriter at the insurance company will review your paperwork to determine your qualifications for coverage, there are a few things you can do to help the process run as smoothly as possible.

## **TIP #1: Avoid Holes In Your Foundation**

Your application becomes the foundation of your benefit request. If there are holes in your application due to missing or incomplete information, the process of evaluating your benefit request cannot be started.

That's why the benefits administrator for the IEEE Member Group Insurance Program has developed a verification process that begins before your application even goes to the insurance company.

"We double-check the IEEE member number and member status and confirm that all information is completed on an IEEE member's application before we ever send it to New York Life Insurance Company (the company that underwrites the IEEE Disability Income Insurance Plan)," says Toni Sanger, Administration Manager for IEEE Benefit Plans at Mercer Consumer.

"This has quickened the turnaround time for IEEE members because the underwriters can begin work immediately when an application arrives on their desk," adds Sanger.

This is also an area where neatness counts. An application that's hard to read may cause delays in your benefit request if the program administrator is forced to go back to you for clarification. So be sure to double-check answers you write in to make sure they're easily legible ... it's an easy way to help make sure your paperwork flows as efficiently as possible.

## **TIP #2: Don't Let Your Doctor Be A Stranger**

In addition to providing complete answers to the questions on your application, it's also critical to include your doctor(s) name, address and telephone number where indicated on the application. (If you need space for additional medical information, be sure to include a separate piece of paper that you have signed and dated.)

"Having accurate and up-to-date medical contact information makes underwriting a significantly smoother process," says Sanger. "Sometimes people just write a doctor's name and the hospital they're affiliated with, but it can be difficult to find answers to questions an

underwriter might have on the status of a certain medical condition when we don't even have a doctor's phone number."

That's why IEEE Group Disability Income Insurance Applications ask for information on any medical problems you may have in addition to your doctor's name, address and phone number. A health condition that may appear to be a "red flag" to an underwriter may be quickly cleared up after a conversation with your doctor or after your doctor provides more information from your medical file.

But if the underwriter can't locate your physician, you won't have the benefit of this potential clarification.

In addition to providing your doctor's contact information, it's also important to include complete and accurate answers to medical and financial questions asked on the application. Avoid using terms such as "approximately" when describing your income which can cause delays in your benefit request while the financial information is verified.

### **TIP #3: Don't Sit On The Sidelines**

Depending on your age and the level of benefits requested, a medical exam, blood test or other medical information may be needed to make a decision on your benefits.

If a medical exam or blood test is required, the insurance company will contact you to arrange a convenient time for these important tests. An independent professional paramedic can perform the tests in the privacy of your own home.

"The biggest delays we see are often in scheduling exams or tests," according to Sanger. "Sometimes this takes several weeks to work out. But with a member who is actively involved in the process, we can often turn those tests around to get an answer much more quickly."

Sometimes the only additional information needed may already be in your medical files. A letter requesting that information will be sent to your doctor. You also receive a copy of that letter to keep you informed of the progress of your request.

"It can be extremely helpful if the IEEE member calls their doctor to tell them an insurance company will be asking for the information and ask for their cooperation in providing the information as quickly as possible," notes Sanger.

"While a letter from an insurance company may not always prompt quick action, a call from a patient asking for help can work wonders in moving the process forward."

### **How Long Is The Waiting Game?**

While we'd all like immediate answers, the underwriting process for disability insurance generally takes between 30 and 90 days. But as an IEEE member, you can also be assured you'll be kept fully informed on the status of your request.

“First, we let members know when their application is received,” says Sanger. A letter is sent confirming receipt of your application ... requesting any missing information ... or notifying you that your application has been sent on to the insurance company.

Then, when the application reaches the insurance company, the underwriters work to make sure you’re aware of the next steps in their process.

Of course, as an IEEE member, you also have access to the coverage administration experts at Mercer Consumer. “We have access to the insurance company’s computer system so we can quickly look up where your application is in the process and let you know what you can expect next,” states Sanger. “Of course, we can’t supply any medical information, in compliance with privacy standards.”

### **But What If ...**

Of course, every benefit request is unique. But IEEE members often ask more targeted questions about their personal situation. Here are answers to just a few of the concerns your fellow members have brought up:

*What if I have a chronic health problem? Can I still get coverage for unrelated disabilities? Or will my health problem exclude me from all disability coverage?*

ANSWER: Members with health problems may still qualify for coverage in the IEEE Member Group Disability Income Insurance Plan. Of course, it depends on the nature of the health issue. Some members are issued full coverage with no exceptions. In other cases, coverage can be issued with a restriction excluding benefits for certain health conditions. And still other members are approved for coverage with a longer waiting period before benefits can be paid.

Because health issues can vary significantly, IEEE strongly urges members with health conditions to request benefits and then work with the underwriting staff to see exactly what level of disability benefits may be available after understanding of the health condition is clarified.

*What if I was turned down for coverage by another insurance company?*

ANSWER: That doesn’t necessarily mean you can’t qualify for benefits through the IEEE Member Group Disability Income Insurance Plan. Acceptance standards can vary greatly between insurance companies. In addition, the situation that caused your original application to be declined may have changed enough to warrant coverage through the IEEE program. For instance, you may have been declined due to a recent surgery. If it has been several months since that surgery, you may now qualify for coverage.

*I recently enrolled in an IEEE life insurance program. Can you use the same information to underwrite my request for disability coverage?*

ANSWER: If you advise the insurance company of your recent life insurance application, the underwriters can review it for any information that might assist in determining of your qualification for disability coverage. However, because disability coverage levels depend upon both your health and your income, and is issued in a separate Group Policy, it is necessary to fill out a disability application.

*I had disability coverage through IEEE a few years ago but dropped it when my new employer offered disability benefits. Now I've moved to a new company and need disability benefits again. Does my status as a "past participant" in the program help me get accepted more easily?*

ANSWER: Every benefit request in the IEEE Member Group Disability Income Insurance Plan is underwritten on an individual basis based on your current health and income levels. Past participation in the program isn't applicable in this process.

*I just started my own business so I don't have a record of my income through my new company. Can I still get coverage through the IEEE Disability Program?*

ANSWER: Within the first year of your new business venture, you can request benefits at the minimum level through the IEEE Member Group Disability Income Insurance Plan. At the end of your first year of coverage, you can request a higher level of benefits based on the income you're earning at that time through your new business.

## **What Happens Once A Decision Is Made**

After the underwriters at New York Life finish reviewing the information in your files, a decision will be made regarding your request for benefits. This decision is passed to the IEEE benefits administrator at Mercer Consumer who then communicates the decision to you.

If you're approved: An acceptance letter will be mailed to you with an official certificate of insurance, your bill and other paperwork you may need for claims in the future. As soon as your premium is paid, your coverage can go in force.

If your request is denied: You'll receive a letter detailing why your application has been declined. In most cases, applications are turned down due to medical reasons. If you disagree with the findings of the underwriter, you can appeal the decision. Additional medical information from your doctor may help convince the underwriter to revise their decision on your benefit request.

## **Disability Protection For IEEE Members**

Are you interested in helping to protect your income against an injury or illness that keeps you from working? IEEE sponsors a valuable long-term disability benefit plan that can give you the advantage of solid protection that is not tied to any employer or job.

Monthly benefit amounts up to \$7,540 with a wide range of benefit waiting periods give you the flexibility to tailor your level of protection to your family's specific financial needs.

For more information\* on the IEEE Member Group Disability Income Insurance Plan, visit the product page on [www.ieeeinsurance.com](http://www.ieeeinsurance.com) or call toll-free **1-800-493-IEEE (4333)**.

\*Features, costs, eligibility, renewability, limitations and exclusions

Underwritten by New York Life Insurance Company  
51 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010  
Under Group Policy G-12150-2  
on Policy Form GMR-FACE/IEEE-DI

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