

## A Guide for Clinicians

# Navigating Disability Benefits for Patients

## With Post-COVID Conditions (PCC)

This handout provides guidance for health professionals on the types of medical evidence that can strengthen disability claims filed by patients with PCC.

However, it is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list of all possible evidence that may be considered by the Social Security Administration (SSA). For more detailed information, please consult the SSA's document, [Long COVID: A Guide for Health Professionals on Providing Medical Evidence for Social Security Disability Claims](#).

## What is Required for a Disability Claim?

The Social Security Administration (SSA) requires objective medical evidence of a Medically Determinable Impairment (MDI) that limits a person's ability to work to support a claim. Here's what you need to know:

- **Symptoms alone are not enough:** While symptoms are important, a diagnosis of PCC and the effects those symptoms have on daily living must be documented.
- **Evidence must come from acceptable medical sources:** Reports from licensed physicians (MDs, DOs), psychologists, speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and Advanced Practice Providers (APRNs/PAs) within their licensed scope are accepted.

## Providing Objective Medical Evidence:



The SSA relies on objective medical evidence to support an MDI claim. This includes:

- **Signs:** Observable anatomical, physiological or psychological abnormalities
  - ✓ Must be shown by medically acceptable clinical diagnostic techniques.
  - ✓ Psychiatric signs must be shown by observable facts that can be medically described and evaluated.
- **Laboratory Findings:** Anatomical, physiological, or psychological phenomena that can be shown using medically acceptable laboratory diagnostic techniques.
  - ✓ Blood tests (positive COVID-19 test is not required)
  - ✓ Electrophysiological studies (EKG, EEG, EMG)
  - ✓ Medical imaging (such as X-rays)
  - ✓ Psychological tests

# Navigating Disability Benefits for Patients With Post-COVID Conditions (PCC)

## Strengthening Your Patient's Application

### Document Any Medical Signs You Observe:

Document functional limitations caused by PCC, such as:

- ✓ **Fatigue:** Persistent or relapsing fatigue that significantly reduces ability to perform daily activities.
- ✓ **Activity limitations:** Exercise intolerance, breathlessness, difficulty walking.
- ✓ **Pain:** Muscle pain, joint pain, chest pain, etc.
- ✓ **Cognitive issues:** Difficulty with memory, focus, processing information.
- ✓ **Mental health issues:** New or worsening depression, anxiety, sleep problems.

### Document the Effects of PCC in the Medical Record:

Include a detailed history of their PCC diagnosis, symptoms, duration and prognosis. Document any conditions related to or exacerbated by PCC.

### Complete Physical and Mental Residual Functional Capacity (RFC) Forms:

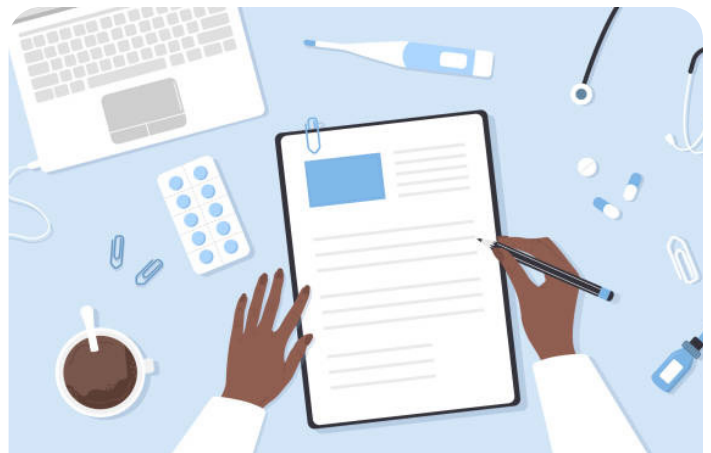
An RFC form is a medical assessment used by the SSA to determine a patient's ability to work despite their limitations. By completing both the mental and physical RFC forms, clinicians provide a more comprehensive picture of the patient's limitations, which can strengthen their disability claim.

### What to Document in RFC Forms:

Your professional opinion on the patient's ability to perform daily activities and work-related tasks.

The patient's limitations in physical and mental functions, supported by clinical findings and observations.

- ✓ **Physical Functions:** Ability to walk, stand, sit, lift, carry, etc.
- ✓ **Physical RFC form** [here](#)
- ✓ **Mental Functions:** Ability to understand instructions, use judgment, adapt to changes etc.
- ✓ **Mental RFC form** [here](#)



## Additional Resources:

[SAMHSA's Documenting Long COVID for SSI/SSDI Applications](#)

**Please Note:** This handout provides general information based on the Social Security Administration's [Long COVID: A Guide for Health Professionals on Providing Medical Evidence for Social Security Disability Claims](#)