



Individuals receiving disability-related benefits and their families often worry about losing their government benefits if they begin to work. This section provides more information on the different types of government benefits and some tips on how one can earn money without being nervous about losing your health insurance and other disability-related benefits.

This information is meant to be a general overview. It is important for beneficiaries to stay informed about their obligations and the terms of their benefits available in SSA's Redbook (<https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/index.html>), and when in doubt, to seek assistance from SSA and/or a certified benefits counselor.

Important Acronyms

- SSA: Social Security Administration
- SGA: Substantial Gainful Activity
- SSI: Supplemental Security Income
- FBR: Federal Benefit Rate (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/cola/SSI.html>)
- ISM: In-kind support and maintenance
- SSDI: Social Security Disability Insurance
- SEIE: Student Earned Income Exclusion
- IRWE: Impairment Related Work Expenses

Defining Disability

Disability is defined by the Social Security Administration under a very specific set of criteria. A person is disabled under Social Security rules if:

- Your medical condition is expected to persist for at least one year or result in death.
- Your medical condition prevents you from returning to your previous job or adapting to a different job.
- Due to your medical condition, you are unable to perform work at the substantial gainful activity (SGA) level.

Substantial gainful activity (SGA) is the amount of monthly earned income that shows a person is doing significant work. If an individual earns more than the SGA amount, they will not be considered to have a disability from SSA's perspective. If an individual earns less than the SGA amount, due to physical or mental impairments, they may be categorized as having a disability.

*Note: The SGA amount changes every year. In 2025 the SGA amount is \$1,620 per month or \$2,700 for individuals who are blind.

SSA Disability Benefits

There are five possible Social Security cash benefits that an individual can receive once determined eligible. The SSA will determine which benefit(s), the individual is eligible for and we will dive deeper into some of these benefits later on.

1. **Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** The program was created for disabled, blind, or 65 and older persons with a limited income and resources. A child aged under 18 can be eligible for SSI

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only if they are disabled according to the SSA's definition of disability for children, and the parent's income and resources meet the eligibility standard for SSI recipients or applicants.

2. **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI):** Is a disability insurance benefit program that provides benefits to disabled persons who have accumulated enough work credits; these are earned based on working and paying Social Security taxes. To be eligible for SSDI, a person does not need to reach a certain age; yet they need to meet the work requirement and credit accumulation.
3. **Childhood Disability Benefit:** It is also known as Disabled Adult Child provision and is available based on a parent's work records. CDB/DAC is available for disabled children aged under 22 who are children of disabled or deceased parents and the death occurred before retirement.
4. **Benefits to Dependent Children of SSDI Recipients:** A child of an SSDI recipient has the right to receive benefits until they turn 18 years (or 19 if they are still in high school). Dependent children do not need to have a disability to be eligible for benefits.
5. **Survivor benefits:** These benefits are provided to the surviving dependents of a deceased worker who earned enough work credits. Children can receive survivor benefits if they are under the age of 18, or up to age 19 if attending school full-time. If the child is disabled and the disability began before age 22, they might be eligible to continue receiving benefits as an adult.

What is SSI?

What is it? Supplemental Security Income (aka Title 16) is a federal assistance program that issues monthly payments to help eligible individuals pay for their costs of food, clothing, and shelter.

Who is it for? SSI is intended for those who are disabled, blind, or 65 years of age and older and have limited income and resources. It is worth noting that unlike SSDI, the eligibility for SSI is not dependent on the applicant's work history. In addition, even when SSA provides a SSDI benefit, this amount can be so low the individual also qualifies and can receive SSI.

What are the requirements to receive it?

- An individual must have a disability according to SSA.
- There is no age requirement or prior work requirement for this type of benefit.
- However, if an individual receives this benefit before age 18, when the individual turns 18, the individual's disability will be re-determined to meet the adult eligibility qualifications.

SSI Resource Limits

As of 2025, the resource limits for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) eligibility are:

- \$2,000 for an individual
- \$3,000 for a couple (married people that both are applying or receiving SSI)

Resources are defined as the things you own that can be converted to cash and spent on food or shelter. Resources include cash, bank accounts, stocks, U.S. savings bonds, land, vehicles, personal property, life insurance, etc. It is anything that can be spent on living expenses. However, not all your resources are counted for these limits. For example, your home and one automobile do not count as resources. You should inquire with the SSA about any resources you may have or acquire during your time on SSI.

Automatic 1/3 Deduction

This guideline is called the “presumed maximum value” rule—PMV. When an SSI recipient is living with someone AND food and shelter are provided, there is the presumed value of this support equals one-third of the FBR (Federal Benefit Rate) and an additional \$20. This value is subtracted from the SSI Beneficiary’s monthly payment amount. For example, if a FBR equals \$967. The one-third of it is about \$322. Plus \$20 GIE makes a total value equal to about \$342. This is the presumed value that is subtracted from the SSI beneficiary’s payment. This automatic deduction is used in those cases when it is hard to determine the exact value of the support or when it is more practical to use automatic one-third deduction. It is not applied, however, if the only assistance received is food or shelter but not both, or if the SSI recipient pays their fair share of the food and shelter costs.

To avoid or reduce this 1/3 deduction, an SSI recipient has a few options:

1. **Contribute to Household Expenses:** Pay your proportionate share of household expenses for food and shelter. You can determine this amount by dividing household expenses by how many people live in your household. If you pay your fair share, the PMV rule does not apply.
2. **Sign a Rental Agreement:** If you are living with someone but not paying your share of the food and shelter costs, consider creating a formal rental agreement or lease that specifies your obligation to pay a fair market value for rent. Make sure to follow through with regular payments as outlined in the agreement.
3. **Live Alone or with Dependents Only:** Living alone or exclusively with others who depend on your income (such as your minor children) means that there is no one else providing you with food or shelter, so the PMV rule would not apply.
4. **Receive Only One Type of ISM (in-kind support and maintenance):** The PMV applies when both food and shelter are received. If you only receive one type of ISM—either food or shelter, but not both—the specific value of what you receive would be counted, not the full one-third deduction.

It's important to keep accurate records of household expenses, rental agreements, etc. If the Social Security Administration has information that accurately reflects your contributions, they can adjust your SSI benefits to match without automatically applying the PMV rule.

SSI and Working

SSA provides certain rules and programs designed to encourage work while maintaining SSI benefits. These provisions are in place to help ensure that the beneficiary’s total income increases with employment.

When you start working while receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), here's what generally happens:

1. **Report Your Earnings:** You must report all monthly income to the SSA by the 6th day of the following month. Untimely reporting is the number one cause of overpayments.
2. **Earned Income Exclusions:** The SSA does not count the first \$65 you make and only half of all earnings over \$65 in a month. This means that if you earn more than \$65 in a month, the first \$65 is exempt and then the SSA only counts 50% of the remaining earnings to determine how much SSI you should get.

3. **Continued Cash Payments:** As a result of the earned income exclusions, you may continue to receive a portion of your SSI cash payments while you are working, depending on how much you earn.
4. **Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWEs):** If you have expenses related to your disability that are necessary for work (e.g., specialized transportation, medical devices, attendant care services), these can be deducted from your counted earnings. If you are blind, you can deduct a lot more through the exclusion of Blind Work Expenses (BWEs). Contact SSA to learn more.
5. **Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE):** If you are under 22 and regularly attending school, there is a special exclusion that allows you to earn more without affecting your SSI benefits.
6. **Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS):** You can set aside money for items or services needed to achieve a work goal without it counting as income or a resource.
7. **Continuation of Medicaid:** Even if your earnings become too high for SSI cash payments, you may be able to keep your Medicaid coverage through the 1619(b) provision.
8. **Expedited Reinstatement (EXR):** This provision lasts for 5 years after cash benefits ended due to work and allows former SSI recipients to restart their benefits without having to file a new application. Upon requesting EXR, up to 6 months of provisional cash benefits will be paid, while SSA confirms the individual is still eligible to receive benefits.

Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE)

What is it? The SEIE is an incentive program that allows students receiving SSI to work and earn money without immediately affecting their SSI benefit.

Who is it for? This program is available to individuals who are under the age of 22, unmarried, receiving SSI benefits, and actively attending school.

What are the requirements to receive it?

- The individual must be younger than 22.
- The individual must be unmarried.
- The individual must be currently receiving SSI benefits.
- The individual must be a student regularly attending school, which can include:
 - High school
 - A college or university for at least 8 hours a week,
 - A vocational or technical training program for at least 12 hours a week (or 15 hours a week if shop practice is involved).
- During breaks such as summer vacation, the student must communicate to the SSA their intention to resume school attendance after the break to maintain eligibility for the SEIE, which will then be applicable to summer earnings.

How does it work?

- The student can earn up to \$2,350 per month (for 2025) without those earnings affecting their SSI benefits.
- There is an annual limit of earnings at \$9,460 (for 2025), after which earned income will count against SSI benefits. Even if SSI benefits are reduced after surpassing the annual limit, the student's total income may still be higher due to the combination of earned income and any remaining SSI benefits.



How do you claim SEIE?

- To apply the SEIE to your earnings, contact your local Social Security Office and provide:
 - Proof of school enrollment.
 - Evidence that you are employed (such as pay stubs or a statement from your employer).
 - A request for the SEIE to be applied to your earned income.

It's important to report changes in your work or school status to the SSA promptly to ensure you receive the correct amount of SSI benefits while utilizing the SEIE. Keep in mind that the earnings limits can change annually, so it's wise to check for updated amounts every January.

ABLE Account

What is it? An ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) Account is a special savings account for individuals with disabilities, which allows them to save funds without affecting their eligibility for SSI benefits. Up to \$100,000 in an ABLE Account is excluded from SSI's resource limit.

Who is it for? The ABLE Accounts is for disabled people who want to save more money than the SSI resource limits allow. These accounts provide a way to save additional money without losing eligibility for SSI cash benefits and other federal benefits like Medicaid.

What are the requirements?

- The individual's disability must have occurred before turning 26 years old.
- ABLE accounts can only be opened through qualified ABLE programs or institutions, and each individual is limited to one ABLE Account.
- Contributions to an ABLE account are capped annually; for 2025, the total annual contribution limit from all sources is \$19,000. The amount may be subject to change, so it's important to check for the current year's limit.
- The funds in the account must be used for qualified disability expenses, which may include education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, healthcare expenses, assistive technology, personal support services, and other approved expenses that improve health, independence, and/or quality of life.

Additional Information:

- Contributions to the ABLE account can be made by anyone, such as family and friends.
- ABLE account earnings grow tax-free as long as funds are used for qualified disability expenses.
- Some states may offer ABLE accounts that allow for tax deductions or credits for contributions made to the account.
- You can choose to open an ABLE account in any state, not just your state of residence. Frankly, some states have better plans, to compare features and benefits go to: <https://www.ablenrc.org/compare-states/>
- If the ABLE account exceeds \$100,000, the excess funds may be counted as resources, potentially suspending SSI cash benefits until the account balance is back below the threshold. However, Medicaid eligibility continues regardless of the ABLE account balance.
- It's important to keep records of all monies spent from your ABLE account just in case you need to show the purchase was for a qualified disability expense.

Plans to Achieve Self Support (PASS)

What is it? A Plan to Achieve Self-Support is a work incentive program that allows people with a disability who receive SSI to set aside money and other resources for a limited time to achieve a work goal. The money put aside in a PASS is not considered income or resources by SSA and will, therefore, not affect the SSI benefit amount.

Who is it for? PASS is for SSI recipients who have a work goal that would enable them to earn enough money to reduce or eliminate their reliance on SSI benefits.

What are the requirements?

- SSI recipient is under 65 years old
- Have income or resources over \$2,000 to set aside in the PASS.
- A specific work goal will lead to reduced reliance on SSI to meet basic needs.
- Work with the PASS cadre to create a plan. Find your PASS cadre here: <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/passcadre.htm>
- This plan must be approved by the Social Security Administration.

Additional Information:

- A step-by-step guide for creating a PASS is available here: <https://www.passonline.org/>
- A PASS can be used to save for work-related expenses, including education, training, equipment, start-up business costs, etc.
- PASS funds must be kept in a bank account separate from other funds.
- Regular updates on progress as outlined in the plan must be provided to SSA
- If the conditions of the PASS are not met, the exclusion of the set aside funds from income and resources may end, which could affect SSI benefits.
- A PASS can be combined with other work incentives, like earned income exclusions, to maximize the benefits while working towards self-sufficiency.
- The PASS program is tailored to everyone's situation, so it's important to work closely with the SSA to ensure that the plan is feasible and meets all required criteria.

Ticket to Work Program

What is it? The Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program supports private organizations and government agencies that provide training and employment services for disability beneficiaries. The program offers free services such as Vocational Rehabilitation, job coaching, job counseling, and training to help participants find and maintain employment.

Who is it for? The program is designed for individuals with disabilities who are able to work and want to maximize their earning potential by leveraging work incentives.

What are the requirements?

- An individual must be 18-64 years old and receiving SSI and/or SSDI benefits.
- It is a free and voluntary service. Therefore, one can use this program, but there is no penalty if they don't.

What are the benefits of participating in the Ticket to Work Program?

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- Participants receive assistance and support throughout their journey to employment
- Ticket participants are exempt from Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs) as long as they are making timely progress within the program guidelines, which provides security from losing benefits based on work activity.

How do you participate in the Ticket to Work Program?

- An individual can participate in the program by contacting an Employment Network (EN) or by calling the Ticket Call Center at the number below. Employment Networks are private organizations or government agencies that have agreed to work with Social Security to provide employment services to beneficiaries with disabilities.
- For a comprehensive list of ENs, visit SSA's Choose Work website at <https://choosework.ssa.gov/findhelp>
- For more information on the TTW Program, including a list of approved ENs, call **1-866-YOURTICKET (1-866-968-7842)** or for TTY call **1-866-833-2967** between 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern time (Monday through Friday).
- You can find information about the TTW Program online at
 - www.socialsecurity.gov/work
 - <https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10062.pdf>
 - <https://www.equipforequality.org/ttw/#:~:text=There%20are%20two%20ways%20Ticket,stop%20this%20type%20of%20review>

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

What is it? Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a program supported by both federal and state funding, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, which offers a range of employment-related services to individuals with disabilities. While VR services are a part of the larger Ticket to Work Program, they can also support people with disabilities that are not receiving disability-related benefits.

VR services focus on helping participants obtain, maintain, or regain employment. It's important to note that VR has distinct goals that focus on pre-employment services; typically, once an individual has maintained employment for 90 days, the VR case is often considered successful, and their case will be closed or handed off to another Employment Network (EN) provider or community partner.

Who is it for? VR is for individuals with disabilities who require assistance to overcome barriers to employment, which can include job training, education, rehabilitation services, or job placement assistance.

What are the requirements?

- The individual must have a physical or mental disability that creates an obstacle to securing employment.
- They must require VR services to prepare for, find, secure, retain, or regain employment.

Additional Information for SSI or SSDI Beneficiaries:

- SSI and SSDI beneficiaries are presumed eligible for VR services.
- To receive VR services, an individual typically needs to apply for services at their local VR office.

- Beneficiaries should keep the Social Security Administration updated on their participation in VR, as it can affect their benefits and exemption from medical reviews while they are actively engaged in the program.

SSI Section 1619

What is it? Section 1619 of the Social Security Act is a provision that allows individuals who are working and receiving SSI to retain their Medicaid coverage even when their earnings become too high to qualify for SSI cash benefits. This provision recognizes the critical need for continued medical assistance and is intended to support the transition to work without the risk of losing health coverage.

Who is it for? This provision is specifically for SSI recipients who are eligible for Medicaid and want to enter the workforce or are currently working.

What are the requirements?

- The individual must have earnings that are too high to receive SSI cash benefits but below the income threshold set by their state for continued Medicaid coverage under Section 1619(b). You can find each state's threshold here: <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/1619b.htm>
- The individual must continue to meet the other eligibility criteria for SSI, except for the level of income.
- The individual must need Medicaid benefits in order to work.
- The individual must not have medical insurance coverage that is comparable to Medicaid.
- It's essential for beneficiaries to report changes in their work activity and income to the SSA to ensure proper determination of their continued eligibility for Medicaid under Section 1619(b).

Thresholds and Exceptions:

- The income thresholds for Section 1619(b) eligibility, known as "threshold amounts," vary by state and can be affected by factors such as living arrangements and other factors.
- The threshold amounts may be higher for individuals who have higher medical expenses, which are factored into the state's threshold calculation.
- If an individual's earnings exceed their state-specific threshold, they may still be able to keep their Medicaid coverage through a process called "individualized threshold."

What is SSDI?

What is it? SSDI provides financial support every month to individuals who cannot work due to a serious and long-term disability.

Who is it for? This program supports people with disabilities who have worked in the past and accumulated enough work credits (see below).

What are the requirements?

- They must be "disabled" according to the standards set by the SSA.
- The individual must have accumulated a sufficient number of work credits by paying into Social Security through their job.

Work Credits

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- The number of work credits needed for SSDI depends on how old you are when you become disabled:
 - If you're under 24 years old, you generally need 6 credits earned in the 3 years before your disability started.
 - If you're between 24 and 31 years old, you typically need work credits for half the time between turning 21 and when you become disabled. For example, if you become disabled at age 27, you would need 3 years of work credits, which is usually 12 credits, within the past 6 years.
- In 2025, one work credit is earned for every \$1,810 in wages or self-employment income, up to four credits per year. It's worth noting that while you earn credits annually, you're not limited to earning one credit per quarter. Once you've reached the annual earnings threshold needed for four credits (in 2025 \$7,240), additional income won't earn you more credits within that year.

SSDI and Working

Similarly to SSI, there are rules and/or programs that help individuals with disabilities work without worrying about losing SSDI benefits.

Work Incentive Three-Stage Process

1. **Trial Work Period (TWP):** The TWP allows beneficiaries to test their ability to work for nine months without impacting their SSDI benefits, regardless of how much they earn. A "trial work month" is any month in which earnings exceed a certain threshold, which for 2025 is \$1,160. These nine months do not need to be consecutive but must occur within a rolling 60-month period (i.e. they reset every 5 years).
2. **Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE):** After completing 9 months where countable gross earnings are at or above trial work level, beneficiaries move to the 36-month EPE phase the first time they earn over SGA (in 2025 \$1620). The first month of EPE is called the "month of cessation" and is immediately followed by 2 grace-period months. Beneficiaries will receive their full SSDI cash benefit during the month of cessation and the two grace period months that follow. If countable earnings remain above SGA after the grace period, beneficiaries will not receive their SSDI cash payment. But, for any month their countable earnings fall below the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) threshold they will be entitled to receive their full SSDI cash benefit. The SSA does not count Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWEs) when calculating countable earnings.
3. **Expedited Reinstatement (EXR):** If beneficiaries work and earn above the SGA level after their EPE, they may not receive SSDI benefits. However, if within five years after the EPE ends, their earnings fall below SGA due to their disability, they can request to have their benefits restarted without a new application. This is known as EXR and includes a six-month provisional period for monthly cash benefits while the SSA determines if they meet the requirements for reinstatement.

Medical Improvement

Medical improvement could lead to the termination of your SSI or SSDI benefits, if the Social Security Administration finds that your medical condition has improved to the point of performing substantial gainful activity.

Below, are the reasons and how the SSI or SSDI benefits can be terminated:

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1. **Earnings above SGA within a year of onset:** For SSDI recipients, should your income exceed the SGA threshold within 12-months of your disability onset date (this date determined by SSA), you are not protected by Trial Work Period provisions because you do not meet SSA's definition of disability, and your claim may be denied.
2. **Regular Disability Status Review:** If you are receiving disability benefits, the SSA continuously re-examines your condition's case to determine if you still meet the standard for disability according to the SSA's definitions. The examination is known as Continuing Disability Reviews.
3. **Medical Improvement:** Should a CDR reveal that the evidence attending your medical review indicates that your health has improved so much that your medical status does not align with the disability standards set by SSA, then the SSA might decide that you are capable of work.
4. **Work Capability Determination:** During the CDR, the SSA also examines your RFC the residual functioning capacity to ascertain the employment possibilities that you might have. If it reveals that you are capable of earning SGA, your disability benefits will be terminated.

Exceptions: There are several work incentives and programs, such as the Ticket to Work program or provisions for vocational rehabilitation, which can allow you to continue receiving benefits while you attempt to return to work, even if your medical condition has improved. These exceptions are part of the SSA's efforts to encourage beneficiaries to work if they are able.

Right to Appeal: It is important to note that the SSA does not terminate benefits for medical improvement without thorough consideration, and beneficiaries have the right to appeal any decisions they disagree with. They also have the right to a face-to-face hearing and to be represented by an attorney or other qualified individual if they choose.

Resources

- Advocations
 - While based in North Carolina, this organization helps individuals with disabilities across the country with employment and benefit services. They help with job placement and employee support. In addition, they help those who are receiving disability benefits navigate the complexities of continuing to receive these benefits while working.
 - Website: <https://advocations.io/>
 - Address: 229 S. Brevard Street 201 Charlotte, North Carolina, 28202
 - Contact: (877)-365- WORK (9675)
 - Email: hello@advocations.io