

Basics of Social Security: Benefits & Policy

Thursday, September 26, 2024
2:00 PM – 3:30 PM ET



Association of University Centers On Disabilities

Zoom Housekeeping

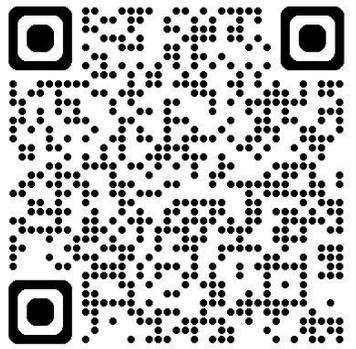
- Ensure your name is displayed correctly in the participant list. You may also include the program name and state and pronouns.
 - Example: Mollie Blafer, AUCD, she/her
 - Hover over your name in the “Participants” box and select “More” → “Rename”
- Remain muted unless speaking
- State your name prior to speaking
- Captioning is available
- Recording will be available on webpage and by request
- Use the chat box to introduce yourself!

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SOCIAL SECURITY DISABILITY BENEFITS

Darcy Milburn
Director of Social Security and Healthcare Policy
The Arc of the United States

What is The Arc?

- The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes.
- Advocacy and direct service provision
- National network of 600+ state and local chapters

Defining Disability

- **To meet the Social Security Administration (SSA)'s definition of disability**, you must not be able to engage in any “substantial gainful activity” (SGA) because of a physical or mental disability that is either:
 - Expected to result in death.
 - Has lasted or is expected to last for at least a year.
- **The SGA amount for persons with disabilities other than blindness is \$1,550 per month in 2024.**

Who is included? Who is excluded?

- There are millions of people with disabilities who cannot benefit from these programs.
- Some may need help they are not getting because our system is not designed to provide that help.



Social Security and SSI Basics

- When people talk about “Social Security” they may be talking about two different programs.
- The first program is Social Security Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI).
- The second program is Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- Both of these programs provide income support or cash assistance to people with disabilities.

Social Security
Old Age, Survivors,
and Disability
Insurance (OASDI)

Supplemental
Security
Income (SSI)

Key Differences

Supplemental Security Income

- Funded by general taxes
- “Means-tested” benefit

Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI)

- Funded through payroll taxes
 - Social Insurance

Why is Social Security and SSI important?

- Social Security is important because it provides cash assistance. It is also important because it gives participants access to health care.



If you have Social Security OASDI benefits, you are eligible for Medicare after a waiting period.



If you have SSI, in most states that means you are eligible for Medicaid.

SSI

Social Security
Old Age, Survivors, and Disability
Insurance (OASDI)

Social Security
Disability
Insurance (SSDI)

Social Security
Survivors
Insurance

Disabled Adult
Child (DAC)

Disabled
Widow/er

How do I get Social Security or SSI?

- To get any kind of Social Security disability benefits, you have to go through the disability determination process.
- They will review medical records and information about your income, resources, and your work record.
- After you are found to be “disabled” then they will also conduct reviews to ensure that you are “still” disabled.
- **Making sure this disability determination process works for people with disabilities is a very important policy issue.**

SSI Key Facts

- Around 7.4 million beneficiaries
- Max benefit 2024: \$943/\$1,415 per couple
- Average benefit: \$696 a month
- Total cost: \$65 billion per year
- More than 40% of SSI beneficiaries live below the federal poverty level
- Means-tested, complex rules:
 - Asset limits and income limits
 - Earned and unearned income reduce benefit levels
 - “In-Kind Support and Maintenance” can reduce benefit levels
 - Marriage penalties

Spotlight: SSI Asset Limits

- An SSI beneficiary is not allowed to have more than \$2,000 in total financial resources at any time.
 - Married couples are only allowed \$3,000.
- Resources that count towards the SSI asset limit include: cash, money in bank accounts, most retirement accounts, stocks and bonds, the value of life insurance policies and burial funds over \$1,500, and some personal property.
- SSI's strict asset limits haven't been updated since 1984.

Spotlight: SSI Marriage Penalties

- **“Holding out” rule.**
- **If two SSI beneficiaries marry each other →**
 - 25% cut in monthly benefit AND 25% reduction in assets.
- **If SSI beneficiary marries a non-beneficiary →**
 - Portion of non-SSI spouse’s income is allocated to SSI spouse.
 - Can reduce monthly benefit amount or make SSI spouse ineligible.
 - 25% reduction in assets.
 - SSI beneficiary can lose benefits altogether if their joint financial resources exceed 3,000.



SSDI Key Facts

- 7.9 million SSDI beneficiaries
- Only 33% of applicants ultimately qualify
- SSDI trust fund solvent, but overall Social Security trust fund will not be able to pay out full benefits starting in 2035.
- 5-month waiting period for benefits
- 24-month waiting period for Medicare
- No asset limits
- Complex work rules

Disabled Adult Child (DAC) Benefit

- 1,142,699 disabled adult child beneficiaries
- Comes from the parent's work-record and a parent's triggering event (disability, retirement, death). Benefit level higher for death of a parent.
- Disability must have begun before the age of 22.
- Often higher benefit than SSI cash benefit.
- Entitled to Medicare (after waiting period), may retain access to Medicaid if a SSI beneficiary.
- Complex work rules
- Marriage penalty

Key Issues

SSI

- Asset limits
- Income limits
- Outdated rules
- Marriage penalties
- Beneficiary poverty

SSDI

- Complex work rules
- DAC work and marriage penalties

Both

- Access to benefits
- Administrative burden
- Work barriers
- Overpayments
- SSA customer service

SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act

The bipartisan **SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act (S.2767/H.R.5408)** would empower millions of people with disabilities to earn and save more money for their futures by:

- Raising the asset limits for individuals to \$10,000
- Raising the asset limits for couples to \$20,000 to help correct a harmful marriage penalty
- Indexing the asset limits to inflation moving forward



Marriage Equality

- **The SSI Savings Penalty Elimination Act (S.2767/H.R.5408)** would eliminate the SSI asset limit 25% marriage penalty.
- **The Marriage Equality for Disabled Adults Act (H.R.6640)** would end marriage penalties for DAC beneficiaries and end the “holding out” rule.
- **The SSI Restoration Act (H.R.7138)** would make long-overdue reforms to the SSI program, increase benefits, eliminate marriage penalties, and update eligibility requirements.





THANK YOU

Questions?

Thank you!

- This webinar will be archived and available to you via the Event Page and on the AUCD Emerging Leaders Community website.
- Please complete the [evaluation](#) at the end of this webinar!

