



Promoting Employment for Persons who Qualify for SSA Benefits

Many youth and adults with disabilities qualify for cash benefits and related health care through the Social Security Administration (SSA). For many beneficiaries, family members, and community agencies these programs are confusing. There is a good deal of misinformation which can undermine the goals and future aspirations of beneficiaries.

SSA administers two cash benefit programs for people with disabilities: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). These programs are different in their purpose, history, and scope. It cannot be overemphasized that employment affects these programs differently!

Social Security Disability Insurance

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is the public's long-term disability insurance program. One is eligible for "Title II" benefits as a result of working, but having/acquiring a disability which prevents the person from earning substantial gainful activity (CY 09: \$980/mo.). In addition, children with disabilities may be eligible for a prorated share of a parent's Social Security, under

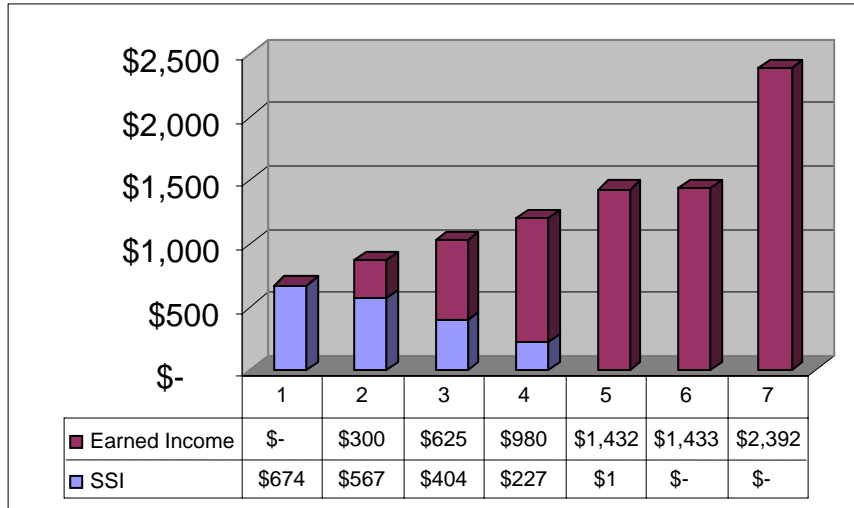
"Childhood Disability Benefits" (CDB). It is possible that these "children" may continue to receive CDB into adulthood. There are specific work incentives applicable to SSDI, as well as work incentives that are common to both SSI and SSDI.

Supplemental Security Income

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is payable to adults or children who are "disabled or blind, have limited income and resources, meet the living arrangement requirements." The monthly SSI amount includes a federal benefit rate (\$674 CY 09) and a PA state supplement (\$27.40). The design of the SSI program is such that a recipient is obligated each month to report changes in earned and unearned income, so that the SSI amount is properly adjusted.

As a general observation, SSI is a work friendly program. Assuming on-going eligibility, the SSI beneficiary who works may have a reduced SSI payment but will have significantly greater monthly income. For CY 08, an SSI beneficiary who receives the standard SSI, excluding state supplement, with no unearned income or specific work incentives would need a monthly employment income of least \$1,433 in order to have the SSI reduced to \$0. Furthermore, the PA beneficiary would need to earn an annual salary of \$28,699 (2009 PA Medicaid Threshold) in order to have earnings which result in termination

The chart to the right reflects the change in monthly income for an SSI beneficiary who is working. This includes the change in the SSI federal benefit rate plus earned income of the individual, including standard exclusions.



There are a variety of work incentives specific to persons receiving SSI. The Student Earned Income Exclusion is specifically for in-school youth under 22. For CY 09, a student can have up to \$1,640/mo. and \$6,600/yr. of earnings excluded from reportable earnings. Individuals can also apply for a savings plan under a Plan for Achieving Self Support in order to pay for training, items and employment related activities.

Representative Payee

Social Security's Representative Program provides financial management of the SSDI and SSI payments for beneficiaries who are incapable of managing their Social Security or SSI payments. Having power of attorney or a joint bank account with the beneficiary is *not* the same thing as being a representative payee. Representative payees are expected to report all relevant changes to SSA including changes in income, living arrangement, and other eligibility requirements.

Work Incentives Planning Assistance

The Work Incentives Planning Assistance Program (WIPA) has been established in each community through cooperative agreements with SSA. The WIPA service provides individualized information about the impact of work on the SSA cash and related benefits of the beneficiary. Individuals who receive SSI and/or SSDI may be eligible for WIPA services beginning at age 14.

PA Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities

In most states, including PA, SSI recipients are automatically eligible for Medicaid. There are additional ways in which persons can become eligible for Medicaid. The PA Department of Public Welfare (DPW) offers Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD) to persons 16 and older. Individuals must have a severe disability (i.e. comparable to eligibility for SSA benefits) and must be working. Under MAWD, DPW has increased the Medicaid asset limitation from \$2,000 to \$10,000.

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