

# SSI Benefits & Related Work Incentives

## Fact Sheet 2019

### **Basics of SSI Eligibility:**

SSI (Supplemental Security Income) is a low income, needs-based program. It is intended to supplement income a person may or may not have, to ensure that they are able to cover their basic living expenses, e.g. shelter, food, etc. Additionally, SSI recipients are entitled to Mass-Health Standard, at no cost. To qualify for SSI, an individual must be 65 or older, or under 65 and disabled, and have limited income and resources:

- Single beneficiaries cannot have more than \$2,000 in a bank account.
- Married couples, who both receive SSI, cannot have more than \$3,000 in a bank account.
- Beneficiaries can own one home and one vehicle.

### **SSI Payment Factors:**

In Massachusetts, SSI beneficiaries usually receive two payments on the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month, the Federal Benefit and the State Supplement. Monthly payments can vary from month-to-month, due to the following factors which Social Security considers when determining the SSI payment:

- Living Situation (Do they live alone, or live in someone else's home, or do they have a roommate?)
- Marital Status (Are they married? If so, does the other spouse also get SSI?)
- Earned & Unearned Monthly Income (Did they work, get other cash benefits, or other income?)
- Applicable Work Incentives (Are they eligible for any SSI work incentives?)

### **SSI Work Incentives:**

Social Security created four work incentives for SSI beneficiaries that, if applicable, can reduce the impact countable income normally has on SSI payments when working. These include:

### **Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE):**

This is a special exclusion for individuals who are under the age of 22, regularly attending school, and are working. With SEIE, a qualified individual in 2019 can earn up to \$1,870 in a month, or a maximum of \$7,550, without experiencing any impact on their SSI cash benefits.

### **Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWEs):**

If you have reasonable expenses for items and services that are related to your disability, that are necessary for you to work, that you pay for out-of-pocket in the months you are working, and that you are not reimbursed for by another source, then you may be able to get half of these costs reimbursed in your SSI payment, if you apply for IRWEs. A few examples of IRWEs are specialized transportation, assistive technology, prescription copayments, etc.

### **Blind Work Expenses (BWEs):**

If your disability on record with Social Security is statutory blindness, Social Security will fully reimburse you in your SSI payment for related expenses (e.g. service animals, adaptive devices, etc.) and unrelated expenses (e.g. meals consumed during work, transportation, income taxes, etc.), which you incur and which are needed for you to work.

### **Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS):**

A PASS allows you to set aside income and/or resources for a specified time to achieve a work goal. A PASS can help you establish or maintain SSI eligibility and can increase your SSI payment amount, while being able to save money to pay for items/services specifically stated in your PASS plan.

### **SSI & Work - Monthly Calculation:**

In order to determine your SSI payment amounts for the month, Social Security does a calculation where

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they take into consideration the SSI payment factors, as stated previously. Generally, as your countable income increases, your SSI will reduce. This is done by applying two income exclusions:

- General Income Exclusion: \$20 of income (earned or unearned) is not counted.
- Earned Income Exclusion: \$65 of work income is not counted.

In other words, if you only receive work income for the month, then \$85 of that is basically yours, and will not have any impact on your SSI benefits.

After applying the exclusions, Social Security then divides your remaining work income by 2, to determine your countable income. That amount will be subtracted from the maximum SSI cash benefit associated with your living situation, and the difference will be your adjusted SSI payment.

### **SSI & Work - Break Even Point**

Beneficiaries whose income increases to the point where their SSI payments reduce to \$0 will:

- Continue having an open SSI case for at least another 11 months, and
- Their MassHealth Standard will most likely be protected indefinitely because of a special healthcare work incentive known as Continued Medicaid Eligibility, or 1619(b).

The only instances an SSI case will terminate is when a beneficiary is unable to exhaust any excess resources within 30 days of notification, or if the person does not receive an SSI payment for 12 consecutive months, due to excess income.

### **Tips for Reporting to Social Security:**

- Report any new work activity to your local Social Security office in-person or by phone by the 6<sup>th</sup> of the following month you start working. When doing so, Social Security may give or mail you a

Work Activity Report (*Form SSA-821*) for you to complete. This form will capture basic information about your job. To review this form, visit:

[www.ssa.gov/forms/ssa-821.pdf](http://www.ssa.gov/forms/ssa-821.pdf).

- SSI recipients have from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of every month to report any income they received or earned during the previous month. They can report work income to their local Social Security office by using one of the following methods:
  1. In-person delivery of paystub copies (also necessary if applying for work incentives)
  2. Postal mailing of paystub copies (call local office a week after mailing to confirm they received reported income)
  3. SSI Wage Reporting System 1-866-772-0953 (Social Security permission needed)
  4. SSI Mobile Wage Reporting Application (Social Security permission needed)
- Lastly, inform Social Security immediately about any significant work or life changes, such as increased work hours, job promotions, change of address, change in bank account, change in your living situation, etc.

*When working, SSI cash benefits will gradually decrease as an individual's monthly income increases. Regardless, they'll always have more available monthly income when they work.*

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