

You Can Make it Work!

The Basics of SSI and SSDI and Work

Slide 1

Hi everyone, my name is Barbara Lee, I'm from Work Without Limits Benefits Counseling at UMass Medical School. We've been invited to provide you with some information about the basics of SSI which is Supplemental Security Income and SSDI, Social Security Disability Insurance and work and how work impacts those benefits.

Slide 2: Work Without Limits Benefits Counseling

Work Without Limits Benefits Counseling, that is the name of our program. We are Certified Work Incentives Counselors (CWICs) trained on SSI/SSDI, public health insurance and benefits, as well as other related work incentives. Both of those programs have work incentives built into their programs and we are trained and certified to explain to people how earnings from work can impact those benefits.

Our services include one-on-one counseling for individuals and we do that either in person or over the phone. We want to speak to those individuals who are working or actively seeking work. Many people are very concerned about what's going to change, how do they report, and these are things we can explain to people.

We also provide fee for service trainings on SSI/SSDI, healthcare & other public benefits. These trainings will be mentioned at the end of this presentation though we also have many more on our website.

Our mission is to increase awareness of work impact on public cash, healthcare, and other benefits and hope that once people have the information they will want to work.

Slide 3: Don't believe the myths!

Don't believe the myths! There are many myths out there of people saying things to people about their benefits and what is going to happen to their benefits. We have been hearing these myths all the time. I hear them over the phone, I hear them from people and the reason why we are discussing this right now is we want to make sure you realize that they are inaccurate.

The first one is, "If I work I will lose my health insurance". That is not true. In Massachusetts everybody must have health insurance. Therefore, the health insurance the person has may change but they will not lose it if they work.

"I can't work more than 20 hours, or I'll lose my benefits", another very inaccurate statement. People can work as much as they want because Social Security doesn't care about how many hours somebody is working, they care about how much somebody is earning in a calendar month. People do not lose their benefits right away. People think as soon as I go to work everything is going to change. It doesn't change overnight, and, in some cases, it doesn't change at all.

So, again, the key message here is, it's not about hours it's about earnings.

"If I work I'll be worse off financially!" I do believe people feel that is true because they will see some changes with their benefits, public housing or SNAP benefits, which is food stamps, they may see some

changes with that and that may make people feel they are worse off financially. Actually, anybody who is receiving a Social Security benefit will always be better off by working than not working.

“If I work I’ll lose my cash benefits!” Also, another inaccurate statement. Nothing happens right away, and if it does happen, it happens over time. Certainly, with SSDI, it’s a step program; and people will see that their cash benefits on SSI will change but that does not mean that they lose them.

“If I get off of my benefits I’ll never get them back again”. Again, there are different work incentives that can help people receive their benefits again if they work and things don’t work out or if they need to have their benefits back again. These are part of the work incentives that we discuss with individuals.

Slide 4: SSA Benefits Programs

SSA, or Social Security Administration Benefit Programs.

SSI is Supplemental Security Income and SSDI is Social Security Disability Insurance. Dual, that you see in the middle there, means that somebody is receiving a little bit of SSI and a little bit of SSDI. They are considered dual eligible.

Slide 5: 4 Main Differences

There are main differences here, four of them, that will help somebody understand and maybe determine which benefit they may be eligible for.

On SSI, it’s a financial need program or what we usually say is it’s a needs-based program, it’s a low-income program. Nobody is receiving a lot of money on SSI.

On SSDI, you must have a work history. Typically, people on SSI do not have a work history or enough work history to be eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance.

SSDI is Social Security Disability Insurance and that is out of the same pool of money as somebody who is receiving Social Security Retirement. The FICA tax that people have in their pay that is taken out contributes to the Social Security program that also contributes to the SSDI and Retirement program, so work is necessary.

SSI does have resource limits. Somebody who is an individual can only have \$2000 in the bank, one car, one house but somebody on SSDI has no resource limits, skies the limit in terms of how much they have, it doesn’t matter how many cars, how many houses and how much money they have. There is no limits.

Somebody who is receiving SSI will have health insurance and it is MassHealth. MassHealth in this state, as you may already know and probably do, is Medicaid. Medicaid is MassHealth. People who are on SSI receive MassHealth Standard. They are not paying for it.

People on SSDI, after two years of receiving SSDI, are eligible for Medicare. In the meantime, they may have some form of MassHealth. It could be MassHealth Standard, depending on what their income is, or it could be MassHealth CommonHealth.

SSI is paid on the first of the month. Why do you think people are paid on the first of the month? Right! It’s for rent. People are always paid on the first of the month on SSI because they need to pay rent.

People who are receiving SSDI will receive their payments on any other day but the first. Typically, it's the third or some other day of the month.

Slide 6: IMPORTANT!

It is very important that people understand that work earnings impact SSI and SSDI cash benefits differently! They are very different animals and they treat earnings very differently.

Slide 7: SSI

We're going to start with SSI

Slide 8: Cash Benefit Impact Factors

Cash Benefit Impact Factors

These are the things that can change somebody's SSI payment.

- Their living situation. Somebody who is living alone receives the maximum SSI right now and that's \$869.39.
- Somebody who is married will receive less than that. They will receive \$630.00 a month.
- Somebody on SSI's monthly income, and that can include earnings, will impact somebody's SSI benefits. Their benefit will go down when they work.

Slide 9: SSI Max Payment Levels

SSI recipients get two payments on the first of the month. They get a Federal Benefit Rate, referred to as the (FBR), and they also get a State Supplement Payment (SSP). Massachusetts is one of the only states in the United States that provide a State Supplement Payment. Most states only receive, on SSI, the Federal Benefit Rate which this year is \$771.00.

If somebody's receiving a State Supplement Payment in Massachusetts, the amount depends on their living situation as we mentioned before. It's important to know what the living situation is for someone to know what the State Supplement Payment is, but they should always be receiving two payments on the first of the month.

Slide 10: SSI Work Calculation

SSI work calculation.

You are always going to start with the gross monthly income. This is what Social Security does as well, they always start with the person's gross earnings in the calendar month, before taxes not after taxes.

So, they take, in this case, \$960 and are going to subtract that first \$85.00. Eighty-five dollars which is in Social Security's eyes is given back to the individual in that calculation. Eighty-five dollars is subtracted from \$960.00 and it equals \$875.00. You take \$875.00 and divide it in half and that equals \$437.50. \$437.50 would be subtracted from the person's SSI Maximum Payment Level, which would become the person's new payment on SSI.

Slide 11: Income Impact on SSI Benefits

How does earnings or income impact on SSI benefits?

As the person's income increases the SSI payment will decrease, always.

Slide 12: SSI Work Incentives

There are work incentives that can help the individual maintain their benefits or even give back some expenses back in their SSI. These are not going to be talked about today, but they are covered when we discuss things with people on SSI. We also have fact sheets that you can access from our website: www.workwithoutlimits.org/benefits-counseling/

Slide 13: SSI Health Insurance & Work

SSI Health Insurance and Work

SSI recipients are automatically entitled to MassHealth Standard. People on SSI are not paying for their MassHealth.

1619(b) preserves MassHealth Standard even when cash benefits stop due to work. If their SSI payment went down, because of earnings, to the point of zero, they can maintain their MassHealth Standard by the 1619(b) rule, which does allow someone to keep their MassHealth Standard even when they are earning up to \$40,000 or a little bit more than that.

Slide 14: SSDI

So, now we're going to talk about SSDI.

Slide 15: Income Impact on SSDI benefits

What the income impact is on SSDI Benefits.

When somebody works, you have to remember the following on SSDI. You will either receive your whole SSDI check or nothing at all. SSDI you either get the whole check or nothing. There are work incentives to keep your SSDI longer, and that is what we refer to as work incentives as well because there's different steps in the SSDI program.

Slide 16: SSDI Trial Work Period

The first step would be the Trial Work Period or TWP.

Trial Work Period is the first incentive available to all working SSDI beneficiaries. What it does is allow unlimited earnings for that individual for up to 9 months. Those 9 months do not have to be taken in a row. They do not have to use right away. They actually have 5 years to complete the 9-month Trial Work Period. Which is really, actually a very nice thing.

A lot of people that want to go back to work who haven't in a while want to try work out, want to see how much they can do without jeopardizing their cash benefits. There is no change in their cash benefit for those 9 months of trial work, so they would be receiving their earnings plus their cash benefit.

SSDI case is open during the Trial Work Period no matter what and even after that for 3 years afterwards. Those 3 years are called the Extended Period of Eligibility.

Please note: This is the first step and other work incentives are available after this ends. Again, we gave fact sheets on SSDI that can help clarify the different steps and what happens after the Trial Work Period.

Slide 17: SSDI Work Incentives

Here are some of the work incentives with SSDI. You can see that Trial Work Period is there, the Extended Period of Eligibility which is the period afterwards that's 3 years and other ones that you may be familiar with or not which are all part of the SSDI Work Incentives program.

Slide 18: Health Insurance Work Impact

What is the health insurance that someone receives on SSDI?

Everybody on SSDI can have MassHealth, they can apply for MassHealth while they are waiting for the Medicare to kick in. Everybody on SSDI receives Medicare after two years of receiving SSDI and in the meantime they can be receiving MassHealth. It may be MassHealth Standard, or it is possible they may be receiving MassHealth CommonHealth and they can apply for MassHealth CommonHealth and pay a little for it.

If SSDI stops due to work it still means they can receive their Medicare, it's called Extended Medicare after that.

Slide 19: SSI and SSDI

SSI and SSDI

Slide 20: Expedited Reinstatement (EXR)

What is Expedited Reinstatement (EXR)?

EXR restores cash benefits. People, again, worry about losing their benefit for good or forever. They can receive it back again as long as they meet these different requirements.

- The case must have been closed because of work
- They must apply within 5 years of that case being closed. As long as they apply within that 5-year window they would be able to receive their cash benefit again on EXR
- When they apply they must keep their earnings below the SGA, which is referred to as Substantial Gainful Activity amount, this year it is \$1,220 gross. So, they are going to be earning below SGA for whatever it is that year, and that usually goes up January 1st every year. You need to know what that number is to keep your earnings below
- This benefit or work incentive is available to both SSI and SSDI beneficiaries

So, again, people can receive their cash benefits back again.

Slide 21: Reporting Best Practices

It's very, very important to report and we are going to give you a few tips on reporting.

With SSI it's a very income sensitive program so a person must be reporting every month. They can report in-person, through the mail, maybe through the SSI Mobile Wage Reporting app., or the Phone-in Wage Reporting System, or you can even do it online in some cases. You might want to, or you may need to go to the local Social Security Office in order to get the Phone-in Wage Reporting System set up.

SSDI best practices are to report in-person, by mail or again you can do it online. If you go to the SSA.gov website, you'd be able to see how you do these things online.

General tips: report regularly and always on time. On time for Social Security means 6 days after the end of the month. At the end of the calendar month, 6 days later if you have reported, you are reporting timely from Social Security's standpoint.

If you are going to be reporting in person or even if you are sending it by mail, certified, you'll want to get a receipt, you want to make copies if you don't get a receipt so you always have documentation as to the fact that you did report regularly and you reported on time to avoid any kind of overpayment or possibly even an underpayment.

Slide 22: Final Thoughts

These are some final thoughts.

If you need any help you want to contact a CWIC for help. There are CWICs throughout the state that can assist you and answer questions for you.

You always want to report regularly because it does ensure success and also ensures that things will be done accurately through the Social Security end.

If benefits stop, they can get them back again. So that is always going to happen. There are all kinds of work incentives that can help keep more of the person's SSI payment and also keep SSDI longer. It's important to learn what those are and again our literature, our fact sheets, can help to do that.

Health insurance is protected. People are not going to lose health insurance.

Our final thought is work is possible and you want to try to encourage your individuals, clients, consumers to work.

Slide 23: Additional Resource and Materials

This is some additional resources.

Slide 24: Individualized Benefits Counseling

This is showing you where our Work Without Limits Benefits Counseling team works. These are our counties that we have identified for us and we are also now in a few counties in New York that are listed there.

If someone is not listed under the Work Without Limits Benefits Counseling territory, the Project Impact, which is the other program that provides similar services to ours are in the other counties Bristol,

Barnstable, Dukes, etc. So, if you do not live in one of the Work Without Limits territory counties you would contact Project Impact and their numbers are there.

Slide 25: Work Without Limits Administrative Employment Network

What is Work Without Limits Administrative Employment Network?

That is also administered through Work Without Limits it's the Ticket to Work program. We do administrative employment here at UMass. We provide in-depth benefits counseling and long-term support for those individuals who are earning or planning to earn \$880 or more through the Social Security's Ticket to Work program. So, it maintains somebody's benefit longer and also, while that person's ticket is assigned they will not have a continuing disability review.

We also work with partners with various vocational rehabilitation organizations to help draw income from the Ticket to Work.

Peter Travisano is the manager and his number and contact information is there and he works on the Administrative Employment Network program.

Slide 26: Work Without Limits Resources

These are the some of the things that we do. Here are some of our links. I was mentioning before our fact sheets on all the different work incentives for SSI and SSDI, healthcare, that is the link that can take you to our website and also bring you to those resources.

This is the Link for the Ticket to Work Administrative Employment Network that's listed there as well as our Work Without Limits program that does all kinds of events and services .

Links

- www.workwithoutlimits.org/benefits-counseling
- www.workwithoutlimits.org/aen
- www.workwithoutlimits.org

Slide 27: Work Without Limits upcoming events

This is just giving you a few of the things that are coming up through Work Without Limits. We have more listed throughout the year if you go to our website. As well as a Disability Mentoring Day, that's going to be in March and these are the contacts for those events.

At the end of the year, in October, we are having a conference, our conference is called Raise the Bar HIRE! I would suggest again going to our website to take a look at that, we're just starting to put some information there. Travis Roy, if any of you know who he is, is going to be our keynote speaker this year. We really encourage people to take a look at what is going to be coming up for the conference and for the career fair.

Slide 28: Thank You!

Thank you very much!