

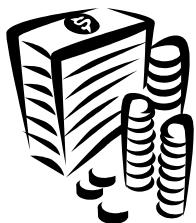
## WHO MANAGES MY SSI BENEFITS?

If you are under 18, you probably do not receive your SSI check yourself. Instead, a person called a “representative payee” which can be the county or your relative or adult friend, receives the check. The payee should use that money to pay for things you need, like medical care, housing, clothing, food and personal comfort items.

If there is money left over from SSI payments that is not needed to pay for things you need, it should be put into a bank account. When you turn 18, you should be able to use that money. This account is called a “maintenance account.”

## WHEN DO I GET TO MANAGE MY OWN BENEFITS?

If the county has been serving as your representative payee, when you emancipate, the county must help you so that you can start getting your own SSI check, or find a responsible adult that cares about you to be appointed as your representative payee.



## CAN I KEEP GETTING SSI BENEFITS AFTER I TURN 18?

County social workers are required to help you keep your SSI benefits after you leave foster care.

If you are already receiving SSI when you turn 18, SSA will ask for information about your disability around the time you turn 18 and decide whether you will qualify for SSI when you are an adult. This is called a “continuing disability” review.” For SSA to find that you are eligible for SSI as an adult, you must have a medical condition that makes it difficult for you to work.

## WHAT IS A DEDICATED ACCOUNT?

It can take a long time for SSA to decide if you are eligible for SSI. You will get payment for the months you are waiting for a decision. If it takes more than 6 months for SSA to decide you are eligible, your payee will put the money from those months of waiting into an account called a “dedicated account.” This money can only be used for certain things, like medical care, education and job training. If you have a medical condition that requires special equipment or services, the money may also be used for these things. Your payee must keep records of how the dedicated account money is spent.

## WHO CAN I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Protection & Advocacy  
(800) 776-5746

Bay Area Legal Aid  
(800) 551-5554

Legal Services of Northern CA  
(916) 551-2150

Disability Rights Advocates  
(510) 451-8644

Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles  
(213) 640-3883

Foster Care Ombudsman  
(877) 846-1602

The Alliance for Children’s Rights  
(213) 368-6010

County contact information

Local legal services organization

Foster youth can ask their social worker for help with SSI questions.



## Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for Foster Youth with Disabilities

### WHAT IS SSI?

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a need-based program that gives cash aid to blind and disabled people (and people over 65) who have limited income and assets. Children, youth and adults can receive SSI. SSI provides a check every month to help meet basic living expenses. The amount of the cash aid depends on your income and living situation.

If you think you have a physical disability, you should consider applying for SSI. You should also consider applying if you have trouble learning, or if you have anxiety or depression that makes it difficult for you to do things that other youth your age do.

This brochure provides basic information about SSI. If you have questions, call one of the organizations listed on the back page or ask your social worker.

## HOW CAN SSI HELP ME?

SSI can help pay for basic living expenses, like rent and food. The amount of the benefit depends on how much income you have and your living situation.

In California, people who receive SSI also receive Medi-Cal benefits and do not have to pay a co-pay when they see the doctor. This will make it easier to get the health care you need.

## WHO CAN GET SSI?

You can qualify if you meet the Social Security Administration's definition of disabled and do not have a lot of income or assets. Income includes things like money from a job and some types of foster care payments. Assets includes things like money in a bank account. In order to receive SSI, you must also be a United States citizen or a qualifying immigrant.



## WHAT IF I DECIDE I DON'T WANT SSI?

If you apply for SSI and are found eligible, it does not mean that you have to accept the benefit. If you begin to receive SSI benefits and then decide you do not want to receive them anymore, you are free to cancel them. You can get a job while receiving SSI, and if you earn enough money, your SSI benefits will end.

## HOW MUCH MONEY CAN I HAVE AND STILL GET SSI?

SSA looks at how much money you earn and have saved to decide whether you can get SSI. If you earn too much money or have too much saved, you will not be eligible. Sometimes SSA looks at the income and savings of the people you live with. If you live with your parents, SSA will count their money as yours. If you live with foster parents, other relatives or roommates, their money will not be counted as yours. Some types of foster care benefits are counted as income.

## MAY I RECEIVE SSI AND OTHER BENEFITS AT THE SAME TIME?

If you receive SSI, you automatically get Medi-Cal, and will not have to pay a co-pay when you visit the doctor or get a prescription medicine.

You cannot receive CalWORKs and SSI at the same time, or food stamps and SSI at the same time. If you have food stamps or CalWORKs and think you might be eligible for SSI, you should apply, because SSI is likely to give you more money than CalWORKs or food stamps.

When you receive SSI, other people you live with can still get food stamps and CalWORKs. If you have children, they can still get these benefits too.

## WHAT COUNTS AS DISABLED?

To qualify as disabled you must:

- 1) not be earning more than \$860 a month when you apply (this amount changes every year). If you are working and earning that much money, SSA will find that you are not disabled.
- 2) have a physical or mental disability, or both, that makes it hard for you to do every day activities. This means that you cannot participate in activities that other youth your age participate in.
- 3) have a medical condition that has lasted a year or more or your doctor says will last one year or more. This means that if you are sick or hurt and are expected to recover in less than a year, you cannot get SSI.

You must meet all three requirements in order to be found to be disabled. SSA will ask you to show evidence from doctors, therapists and professionals at your school that you are disabled. This includes:

- Names, addresses, and phone numbers of doctors, hospitals, clinics, and institutions that treated you and dates of treatment.
- Names of medications you are taking.
- Medical records from your doctors, therapists, hospitals, clinics, and caseworkers including test results.



## THE SSI APPLICATION PROCESS

You can talk to your social worker about applying for SSI. Your social worker can help you with the application, and can help you collect information from your doctors, therapists and school to show that you are disabled.

There are three ways to apply for SSI. You can apply for SSI online, on the phone, or at a Social Security office.

### 1. Applying Online:

The website for online applications is: <http://www.ssa.gov/applyfordisability/>



### 2. Applying on the Phone

To apply on the phone, call (800) 772-1213 between 7 am and 7 pm.

(For the hearing impaired, call TTY (800) 325-0778). You will be given an appointment for a later date when someone from SSA will take your application over the telephone. The date of your appointment is called a protected filing date. If you are found eligible for benefits, they will be retroactive to that day.

### 3. Applying in Person

Locate the SSA office nearest you by calling (800) 772-1213 from 7 am - 7 pm. (For the hearing impaired, call TTY (800) 325-0778). You should make an appointment before going to the office.