



Transition
T E N N E S S E E

Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration (SSA) is a source of economic security for millions of Americans that identify as retirees, people with disabilities, and families of retired, disabled or deceased workers. Americans pay taxes so programs that are funded through Social Security can continue to serve individuals (and their families) who are retired or have disabilities. The eligibility requirements vary among the programs. The main programs for individuals with disabilities are Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI). SSDI gives benefits to individuals with disabilities or who are visually impaired that have worked and contributed to the Social Security trust fund via paying FICA taxes. SSI is an income based program that offers financial assistance to aged, individuals with disabilities or are visually impaired who have limited income and resources. Medical conditions must meet the SSA disability guidelines.

What services or resources does this agency provide?

SSA's primary function is to offer financial assistance and medical insurance coverage to individuals with disabilities, retirees and their families. Another function of Social Security is facilitation of the Work Incentives including the Ticket to Work (TTW) Program. TTW is a free and voluntary program. The Ticket to Work program is intended to aid social security beneficiaries who want to work and participate in planning their employment. The TTW program helps individuals with disabilities obtain employment services from various resources such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), *Employment Networks (EN) and other support services that might be needed to get or maintain a job. Individuals who participate in TTW are given a "Ticket" which entitles them to sign up for assistance provided by an approved service provider. Upon accepting the assignment of an individual's ticket, a service provider will coordinate with other resources to aid individuals with the successful transition to work. Some of the services that might be provided include: career development, training, career counseling, job placement, and ongoing workplace support services.



To navigate the intricacies of SSA and other benefits programs the Social Security Administration funds agencies nationally to operate Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs. The Tennessee Disability Coalition (TDC) and Empower Tennessee collaborate to offer WIPA services across Tennessee. The WIPA programs in this state are called, “Benefits to Work” (BTW). Services received from BTW are free. The mission of Benefits to Work is to: promote awareness and understanding of SSA’s work incentives, to educate about the impact of work on benefits, to assist individuals with disabilities to make informed choices regarding work, and to promote employment and enhance economic self-sufficiency. Both Benefits to Work programs employ counselors called, “Community Work Incentive Coordinators” (CWIC) to help individuals who are: age 14 to retirement, receiving Social Security disability benefits, working, have a job offer, or are actively seeking employment. BTW counselors meet with individuals, inform them about the work incentives, thoroughly review the individual’s circumstances, verify pertinent benefits information, discuss how working will affect disability benefits, health care and other benefits, provide assistance with activities such as writing a **Plan to Achieve Self-Sufficiency (PASS) and how to report employment earnings to SSA. The Tennessee Disability Coalition also employs “Benefits Analysts” who conduct educational presentations about work incentives including Ticket to Work at VR offices, various educational systems, organizations and agencies across the state.

*An Employment Network (EN) is a private organization or public agencies under contract with SSA to provide employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, and other types of support to beneficiaries with disabilities under the Ticket to Work Program. Individuals with disabilities can contact any approved EN to see if their services and supports are appropriate for them. Once the beneficiary picks an EN, they will work together to create a plan in which they describe the beneficiary’s goals and the services and supports that the EN will provide to help achieve the beneficiary’s goals.

**The Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) is an SSI provision that allows an individual to set aside income and resources toward a work goal. SSA must approve the PASS in advance of implementation of a work goal. The income and resources may be used to obtain training or education, purchase equipment needed to perform a designated job, business start-up costs, and more. PASS allows an individual to set aside money that will not be counted as a resource by SSA when used to help you reach your work goals. However, the plan must be one “that will produce sufficient earnings to reduce dependency on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments”. The PASS must have clear goals outlined on a stringent timeline. An individual may receive higher SSI payments while using PASS to achieve goals.

What areas of Tennessee do they serve?

The Social Security Administration is a federal agency serving all eligible citizens of the U.S. including residents of Tennessee.

Is there a cost and, if so, who pays?

There is no cost to receive any of the services provided by SSA.

Who is eligible to receive their services/ supports and when?

Eligibility depends on many factors. Check with your local SSA office to learn more about eligibility requirements for each program.



What is the referral process? What documents are needed?

There is not a referral process to receive SSA services. However, there is an application process that must be followed to apply for social security disability benefits. If an individual applies to receive social security disability benefits and is denied, there is an appeals process. An individual may file a “Request for Reconsideration” to have the initial denial reviewed. Check with your local SSA office to learn about what documents are required for the application and appeal processes.

What is the family’s responsibility?

Family members need to take the responsibility of contacting their local Social Security office to begin the paperwork necessary to receive services and the application process.

What is the responsibility of an educator?

The responsibility of an educator is to be informed about the available resources to aid students and families including the agencies that assist families with the SSA programs, e.g. Benefits to Work.

How (and when) do you involve them in the transition planning process?

1. Contact a representative from your local SSA office to understand how benefits received will change once student turns 18.
2. Reach out to a Benefits to Work counselor to understand how to approach employment without losing SS disability benefits.
3. Students can seek information about the Ticket to Work program prior to turning age 18 by contacting the Social Security Ticket to Work Helpline at 1-866-968-7842.

What questions should I ask the SSA Ticket to Work Helpline staff?

1. Where can I receive help with planning for my future career goals?
2. Who can help with a PASS plan?
3. Is there a waiting period for receiving SSA benefits after I am approved to receive them?

Additional contact information:

1. Give them a call at: 1-800-772-1213
2. Visit the [Social Security Administration website](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).