



*California's Protection & Advocacy System*

# Employment Supports/Work Incentive Programs Under Title XVI –SSI

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## **What Happens To My SSI Benefits When I Go To Work?**

This is one of the most frequently asked questions, by a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient, who wants to work.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) provides employment support/work incentive programs that can assist you in your work efforts. These employment supports/work incentives allow you to keep some, or all, of your SSI payments and MediCal coverage while you transition to work. The following is a discussion of SSA employment supports/work incentive programs available to a SSI recipient who works.

### **I. SSI Employment Support/Work Incentive Programs**

**Countable Income:** When you receive SSI payments and work, SSA must determine your countable income (CI). The CI is the amount, of your monthly gross earnings, that will count against your SSI payment. In other words, your SSI check will be reduced by the countable income amount.

**Calculating Your Countable Income:** When determining how much of your earnings will reduce your SSI payment, SSA calculates your countable earned income (CI) by allowing certain exclusions and expenses to be deducted, from your gross earnings. These expenses and exclusions include:

- *General Income Exclusion (GIE)* – A \$20 GIE is subtracted from any income; earned or unearned.
- *Earned Income Exclusion (EIE)* – A \$65 EIE is subtracted from earned income only.

- *Fifty Percent (50%)* disregard, fifty percent of this subtotal is subtracted because for every \$2.00 you earn, SSA reduces your SSI payment by \$1.00.
- *Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE)* is an expense related to your impairment that you pay for out of your pocket that is not reimbursed by anyone else for goods or services that allow you to work.
- *Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE)* is an exclusion of earnings for a student with a disability who works. The student must be age 22 or less and taking an educational class at school or home.
- *Blind Work Expense (BWE)* is an expense a blind SSI recipient incurs to work. Only a person who is blind can take the BWE.
- *Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS)* is a tool that allows the SSI recipient to set aside a portion of his/her income/resources to reach a specific vocational goal.
- *Property Essential for Self Support (PESS)* is property the self-employed or independent contractor has that is essential to the success of the business. This property/resource will not be counted in the CI calculation to determine eligibility for SSI payments.

**Calculating Your SSI Payment Amount:** To determine how much SSI money you should receive, SSA subtracts your countable income (CI) from your SSI check amount to arrive at a new SSI payment amount if any. In California your SSI check is a combination of payments from the federal and state government. Your SSI check includes.

- Federal Benefit Rate (FBR) – The FBR is the most the federal government will pay in SSI benefits (\$733.00 in 2016).
- State Supplement Program - The SSP is the most the state of California pays in SSI benefits (currently \$156.40 non-Blind/\$211.40 Blind).

*Example:* You work and earn \$1,000.00 gross per month in wages. You also receive a \$889.40 (disabled) or \$944.40 (blind) SSI payment and have SSI-linked MediCal coverage.

This example will demonstrate the countable income and SSI payment calculation using the basic countable income formula. The example does not include any other employment supports/work incentives such as IRWE, BWE or SEIE.

*Countable Income Calculation*

Gross Earnings	\$1,000.00	before taxes
General Income Exclusion – GIE	\$-20.00	
Remainder	\$980.00	
Earned Income Exclusion – EIE	\$-65.00	
Remainder	\$915.00	
50% disregard (divide by 2)	\$457.50	
Total Countable Income	\$457.50	

*SSI Payment Calculation*

	<i>Non-Blind</i>	<i>Blind</i>
2016 Federal Benefit Rate – FBR	\$733.00	\$733.00
2016 California State Supplement Program - SSP	+\$156.40	+\$211.40
Total SSI Grant Amount	\$889.40	\$944.40
Minus Countable Income (from above)	-\$457.50	-\$457.50
SSI Payment Amount	\$431.90	\$486.90

\*\*When TCI is zero or a negative #, you are entitled to your full SSI payment for the month.

Your total income will be \$1,431.90 (\$1000 wages + \$431.90 SSI) or \$1486.90 (\$1000 wages + \$486.90 SSI). You will also retain your SSI-linked MediCal coverage.

**MediCal Coverage:** There are different MediCal categories for which a SSI recipient may qualify to receive MediCal services. These programs include:

- *SSI-Linked MediCal* - Under SSA law, anytime you get \$1.00 in SSI payments you are entitled to full-scope MediCal coverage.
- *Section 1619b MediCal* – Section 1619b of the Social Security Act (The Act) allows you to keep MediCal coverage if the sole reason you lost your SSI cash payment was due to your earnings. You can retain MediCal coverage up to a state “threshold” level of \$37,805 in 2015. You can also negotiate an individual threshold amount with the state MediCal unit based on your individual medical expenses.

- 250% California Working Disabled Program (250% CWD program)*- The 250% CWD program is California's Medicaid "Buy-in" program which allows you to purchase full-scope MediCal coverage through the state MediCal system.
- *Aged, Disabled Federal Poverty Level (A&DFPL) MediCal* – The A&DFPL program provides full-scope MediCal to individuals who meet the income and asset requirements. Blind persons can also qualify for the A&DFPL program if they have a disability.
  - *Medically Needy MediCal program* - The medically needy program is a MediCal program where, based on income, the individual may have a monthly co-payment or "share of cost."

**Expedited Reinstatement:** The expedited reinstatement (EXR) provision, of the Ticket to Work program makes it easier for you to get your benefits reinstated. Under certain circumstances, your SSI benefits can be reinstated even if you haven't been eligible for SSI benefits for twelve (12) or more consecutive months without a new application.

The expedited reinstatement provision allows you to notify SSA that you no longer have earnings that make you ineligible to receive SSI payments. You can request that you need your benefits reinstated. Your benefits can be re-started in approximately three to six weeks.

For more information on SSA employment support/work incentive programs, you can visit the Social Security website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) or obtain a copy of the SSA publication, Redbook on Employment Supports. You can also contact the Area Work Incentive Coordinator for SSA, the Work Incentive Planning and Assistance project in your area. You can also contact the PABSS program at 800-776-5746 or visit the Disability Rights California website at [www.disabilityrightsca.org](http://www.disabilityrightsca.org).

*SSA has reviewed the following publication for technical accuracy only; however, this should not be considered an official SSA document.*

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