

# Your Benefits:

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## Financial Benefits

### SOCIAL SECURITY

**Overview:** Social Security is a monthly payment (“benefit”) available to retired and disabled workers and their dependents and survivors. The amount of your benefits is determined by a formula based on your lifetime earnings, or credits, up until the year before retirement.

The information below is very basic. For more detailed information, please contact Social Security. Recorded information and services are available 24 hours a day. Visit Social Security’s website for very “user-friendly” and easy-to-understand calculators that will help you see what your benefits can be, given your specific situation. **CALL:** (800) 772-1213; for deaf or hard of hearing: TTY (800) 325-0778, or **VISIT:** [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov).

#### Retirement Benefits Eligibility:

**Work Credits:** If you were born in 1929 or later, you need to have earned forty work credits in order to qualify for retirement. Credits are the “building blocks” that help determine if your work history qualifies you for each type of benefits. Forty work credits represents about 10 years of work at jobs where the employer/employee has paid FICA taxes. No retirement benefits can be paid until you have the required number of credits. *Note: The number of credits you need to get disability benefits or survivor benefits*

*for yourself or qualified family members depends on your age and may be fewer than 40 credits.*

**Age:** Your benefit amount is affected by your age at the time you start receiving benefits. If you start your retirement benefits at age 62, which is the earliest possible age, your benefit will be lower than if you waited until you were older. Because of longer life expectancies, the Social Security law was changed in 1983 to gradually increase the Full Retirement Age (FRA) until it reaches age 67 (for people born in 1960 and later). This change began in 2003, and affects anyone born after 1937. For example, for individuals born from 1943 through 1954, full retirement age is the month in which they reach age 66. To find your FRA, check with Social Security.

#### Work and Retirement Benefits:

**Working before FRA:** You can get Social Security benefits while working, but your benefits will be reduced if you are under your Full Retirement Age (FRA). If you start receiving Social Security payments before you reach your FRA, you are allowed to earn up to \$17,640 (2019 limit). After that, your Social Security payments are reduced by a ratio of \$1 for every \$2 you earn above \$17,640.

**During the year of your FRA:** There is a higher limit to your yearly earnings once you reach the year of your FRA. There is also a more beneficial reduction

## Understanding Benefits Available to Seniors

ratio. The ratio moves to \$1 for every \$3 earned above the limit of that year. If you will reach your FRA in 2019, the earnings limit is \$46,920 for the months in the calendar year prior (2018). Starting the month you reach FRA, there is NO limit on your earnings – you can receive your full Social Security benefit along with your full paycheck.

**After FRA:** If you continue working beyond your FRA you can increase your Social Security benefit. Each additional year you work adds another year of earnings to your Social Security record. Higher lifetime earnings can result in higher benefits when you retire. In addition, your benefit will be increased by a certain percentage if you choose to delay receiving retirement benefits.

#### Disability Benefits:

If you are unable to continue working because of poor health and you are under your Full Retirement Age, you should consider applying for Social Security disability benefits. The amount of the disability benefit is based on your lifetime average earnings (the same as a full retirement benefit). If you are receiving Social Security disability benefits when you reach full retirement age, they will be converted into retirement benefits.

#### Spousal and Dependent Child/Parent Benefits:

If someone has worked for a certain length of time, their spouse and children may be

eligible for their Social Security benefits if the worker dies. A widow or widower can receive full benefits at their FRA, or reduced benefits at age 60. If the surviving spouse is disabled, they can receive benefits at age 50. Widows or widowers can receive benefits at any age if they are caring for the deceased worker’s child who is under 16 or disabled. Unmarried children up to age 18 (age 19 if attending high school), children of any age who were disabled before age 22, and dependent parents age 62 or older can also receive benefits. Children in the aforementioned age groups will also qualify while another parent is receiving retirement or disability benefits.

#### Divorcee Benefits:

If you are divorced after at least 10 years of marriage, you can collect retirement benefits on your former spouse’s Social Security record if you are unmarried and at least 62 years of age (age 60 if your former spouse is deceased). Additionally, your ex-spouse’s benefit must be more than the benefit you are entitled to receive based on your own work. If you start receiving benefits from a former spouse at your full retirement age, your benefit as a divorced spouse is equal to one-half of your ex-spouse’s full retirement amount or disability benefit.

In the case of a divorced worker who remarries, both their current spouse and their ex-spouse can receive benefits at the same time from their record.

However, if the ex-spouse gets

on your former spouse's record if you remarry, unless your later marriage ends.

If your former spouse dies and you begin receiving benefits as a "surviving divorced spouse," you may remarry after age 60 (or age 50 if you are disabled) without affecting your eligibility for survivors benefits.

## SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)

**Overview:** SSI is a federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues (not Social Security taxes). The SSI program helps those who have limited income and resources and are age 65 or older, blind, or disabled. This amount can vary depending on the state you live in, your living situation, and other income in your household. If you qualify for SSI, you likely also qualify for Medicaid, a form of health insurance for persons with low income. **CALL:** (800) 772-1213 or **VISIT:** [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov).

### SSI Eligibility:

**Finances:** Your monthly financial resources, including savings and assets, cannot exceed \$2,000 if you are single, or \$3,000 if you are married. There are also limits to the amount of earned and unearned monthly income you may receive. Higher income results in a lower SSI payment. If you are married, and only one person is eligible, a portion of your spouse's income may be counted.

**Social Security:** You may be able to receive SSI in addition to monthly Social Security benefits if your Social Security benefit is low. If you have never worked in

employment covered in Social Security, you can still be eligible for SSI.

**Residence Status:** You must be a resident of the United States and must be a citizen or a non-citizen lawfully admitted for permanent residence. Some non-citizens granted a special status by the Department of Homeland Security may be eligible.

## AID TO THE AGED, BLIND AND DISABLED (AABD)

This program by the Illinois Department of Human Services provides income support to persons who are age 65 or older, blind, or disabled. You must meet other eligibility criteria to receive cash and medical assistance, including having low income. If you receive an AABD payment, you can also receive Medicaid (see Medical section). **CALL:** (800) 843-6154 or **VISIT:** [www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us).

## SENIOR CITIZEN SEWER SERVICE CHARGE EXEMPTION

The City of Chicago Department of Water Management offers seniors a savings on their water bills by exempting the sewer portion of the water bill. In order to qualify for the exemption, you must be at least 65 years of age, be the owner of the residential unit for which exemption is being sought, and occupy the property as your principal place of residence. You must also have a separate water meter or an assessed account for that residence, and the account must be in good standing and not delinquent. Seniors who reside in their own residence but do not

qualify for the Senior Citizen Sewer Exemption because their residence is a townhouse, condominium unit, or cooperative apartment that does not have a separate metered water service may apply for a refund in lieu of exemption. Applications for this refund are made through your Aldermanic office. For information, **CALL:** (312) 744-4426 or for the application **VISIT:** <http://bit.ly/SeniorSewerExemption>.

## LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE (LIHEAP)

This program provides one-time financial assistance with energy bills for persons with low income. Apply early for LIHEAP funds, which tend to run out quickly. If you think you may qualify for LIHEAP, call today. Contact your local Community Action Agency (CAA) to make an appointment to apply for. If you don't know your CCA, visit <http://bit.ly/ILCCA> or call (217) 785-2533. **CALL IN COOK COUNTY:** (800) 571-2332, or **VISIT:** [www.liheapillinois.com](http://www.liheapillinois.com).

## ILLINOIS HOME WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (IHWAP)

This program assists low-income residents in making their dwellings more energy efficient by helping to pay for repairs, insulation, and maintenance of heating systems. Funded services include air sealing, attic and wall insulation, furnace repair and replacement, and electric base load reduction. To be eligible, household include must be at or below 150% of the federal poverty level using State and

HHS funds, and 200% of the federal poverty level using DOE funding. Contact your local Community Action Agency (CAA) to apply. If you don't know your CCA, visit <http://bit.ly/ILCCA> or call (217) 785-2533 or email [communityassist@illinois.gov](mailto:communityassist@illinois.gov). **CALL IN COOK COUNTY:** (800) 571-2332, or **VISIT:** [www.illinoisweatherization.com](http://www.illinoisweatherization.com).

## Medical Benefits

### MEDICARE

**Overview:** Medicare is health insurance for persons 65 or older and for younger people with certain disabilities or permanent kidney failure. *Note: Even if you are not ready to start receiving Social Security retirement benefits, you should still apply for Medicare three months before your turn 65. You can apply for Medicare-only without claiming your retirement benefit. The application can be done online at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov).*

The open enrollment period for Medicare health and prescription drug plans is October 15 through December 7, 2019 for plans starting January 1, 2020.

The publication, "Medicare and You" from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services gives good descriptions of all the various options available to Medicare participants. **CALL:** (800) MEDICARE (633-4227) or **VISIT:** [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

### Most people choose one of two "paths" for Medicare:

#### PATH #1: Original Medicare Plan

The Original Medicare Plan is available nationwide and pays for

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many health care services and supplies, but it doesn't pay all of your health care costs. The Original Medicare Plan includes Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medical Insurance). You can have Part A and/or B; most people have both.

**PART A:** Part A (Hospital Insurance) helps cover inpatient care in hospitals, skilled nursing facility care, hospice care, and home health care. The Part A monthly premium is \$0 for most people, because they paid Medicare taxes while working. If you buy Part A, you could pay up to \$437 each month.

**PART B:** Part B (Medical Insurance) helps cover services from doctors and other health care providers, outpatient care, home health care, durable medical equipment, and many preventative services. The 2019 standard premium for Part B is \$135.50 for most people. Individuals with annual income higher than \$85,000 (\$170,000 for married couples) will pay a higher monthly Part B premium. With Part B there is a deductible that you must pay (\$185 in 2019) before Medicare will pay its share (usually 80%) for covered health services.

**GAPS:** Even after you pay your deductibles, Medicare may not pay for all your medical costs like co-insurance, co-payments, and other deductibles. These costs are called "gaps" in Medicare coverage. If you have Original Medicare you might want to consider buying a "Medigap" policy to cover these gaps in Medicare coverage (see Medigap entry below). You may also need to pay for a "Part D" or Prescription Drug Coverage plan.

**PATH#2: Medicare Advantage Plans (Part C)**

Medicare Advantage Plans, also called Part C, combines Part A and Part B services and is available in many areas. Medicare Advantage Plans are provided by private insurance companies approved by Medicare, including Medicare Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) Plans, Medicare Preferred Provider Organization Plans (PPO), Medicare Private Fee-for-Service Plans, and Medicare Special Needs Plans. Most include Prescription Drug Coverage (Part D).

The "advantage" here is that these plans may give you more choices, extra benefits, and lower costs. If you're in a Medicare Advantage Plan, you don't need a Medigap policy because Medicare Advantage Plans generally cover many of the same benefits that a Medigap policy would cover. However, there are still premiums to pay with Medicare Advantage Plans. Each year, plans decide how much you pay for the covered services you get. What you pay changes only once a year, on January 1.

**OPTIONAL: Medicare Part D Prescription Benefits**

Medicare Part D addresses prescription drug benefits and is optional. Medicare beneficiaries can choose a Prescription Drug Plan (PDP) if coverage of drugs is not included in their Part C plan or provided through an employer health plan. Part D plans have their own premiums and deductibles. With the "fall open enrollment" for Part D plans coming up (October 15 through December 7), there will be a lot of information coming to

seniors about Part D. During this period, individuals can enroll for the first time or they can switch to a more suitable plan. There is great variety among the PDP plans, so don't hesitate to get assistance in choosing the right plan for you. The Medicare website has a tool called a "plan finder" that helps seniors determine which particular plan is a good fit, **VISIT:** [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

**"Extra Help" to Cut Costs of Prescription Drug Insurance**

If you have limited income and few resources, the "Extra Help" program offered by Social Security can be a great help to you. It can eliminate or lower your Part D premiums, co-payments, deductible, and coverage gap costs (your "out-of-pocket expenses"). To qualify for "Extra Help" your annual income is limited to \$18,735 (\$25,365 for a married couple living together). Resources are limited to \$14,390 (\$28,720 if married and living together). Your home and personal property do not count as resources. *Note: income and resource limits and other rules have changed in recent years. If you did not qualify before, you might qualify now or possibly next year. Check with Social Security to see if you can get "Extra Help."*

**CALL:** (800) 772-1213 or (TTY) 1-800-325-0778 and ask for the "Application for Extra Help with Medicare Prescription Drug Plan Costs" (Form SSA-1020). The form can also be found at your local Social Security office or online, **VISIT:** [www.ssa.gov/prescriptionhelp](http://www.ssa.gov/prescriptionhelp).

**MEDIGAP (MEDICARE SUPPLEMENT INSURANCE) POLICY**

A Medigap policy is a health insurance policy sold by private insurance companies to fill the "gaps" in the Original Medicare Plan. Medigap policies help pay some of the health care costs that the Original Medicare Plan doesn't cover. Medigap policies are standardized so you can compare them easily. It's important to compare Medigap policies because costs can vary. **VISIT:** <http://bit.ly/CompareMedigap>.

**HELP WITH MEDICARE CHOICES**

There are many services that help seniors choose the best Medicare option for them. In addition to contacting Medicare, you can contact AARP. **CALL:** (888) 687-2277 or **VISIT:** [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org).

Another helpful tool is "Medicare Interactive," a program of the Medicare Rights Center that gives free resources and information on Medicare, **VISIT:** [www.medicareinteractive.org](http://www.medicareinteractive.org).

The Senior Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is a FREE statewide insurance counseling service for Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers provided by the State of Illinois Department of Aging. **CALL:** (800) 252-8966.

**Have Questions?**

Catholic Charities can help!

**Call: (312) 655-7700**



## ILLINOIS MEDICAID HEALTHCARE AND FAMILY SERVICES (HFS) MEDICAL BENEFITS

Medicaid/HFS is a government-funded program that pays for medically necessary services (including hospital care, nursing facility care, therapies, dental, and eye care), supplies, and medicines for persons with low income and few financial resources. Persons who are disabled, blind, or 65 years of age and older may qualify. **CALL:** (800) 843-6154 or **VISIT:** [www.hfs.illinois.gov](http://www.hfs.illinois.gov).

## Food & Nutrition

### SENIOR FOOD NUTRITION PROGRAM (SFNP)

SFNP is a USDA supplemental food and nutrition program administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) for low-income Chicago residents who are 60 years and older and have an annual gross income at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Income guidelines. A monthly nutritious food package is provided to participants, along with supplemental food and nutrition education services. **CALL:** (773) 523-5758.

### MEALS ON WHEELS

Meals on Wheels provides seniors who are homebound and unable to prepare their own food due to physical or mental difficulties with a nutritious lunch five days a week. Catholic Charities offers Meals on Wheels in Lake County and the South Suburbs. **CALL IN LAKE COUNTY:** (847) 546-5733

or **SOUTH SUBURBS:** (708) 596-2222. **CALL IN CHICAGO:** (312) 744-4016 for the Senior Services Division of the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services; **REST OF STATE:** (800) 252-8966 for the Illinois Department on Aging.

### CONGREGATE MEALS

Hot, nutritious meals are served in a social setting at lunch time in a senior center or restaurant. For Catholic Charities congregate meals **CALL IN LAKE COUNTY:** (800) 528-2000 or **SOUTH SUBURBS:** (708) 383-0258. **CALL IN CHICAGO:** (312) 744-4016 for the Senior Services Division of the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services; **REST OF STATE:** (800) 252-8966 for the Illinois Department on Aging.

### SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM SNAP (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps) is administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and provides cash assistance (in the form of the Illinois LINK debit card) to buy approved food items. Persons aged 60 and older or disabled must meet eligibility criteria, including low income (\$2,010 gross monthly income for a household of one). **CALL:** (800) 843-6154 or **VISIT:** [www.dhs.state.il.us](http://www.dhs.state.il.us).

## Transportation

### REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY

For information on accessible transportation routes, **CALL:**

(312) 836-7000.

Free or reduced fares for seniors and persons with disabilities are available on CTA and PACE transportation services (excluding Paratransit). You must apply in person or by mail. **CALL:** (312) 913-3110 or to download an application, **VISIT:** [www.rtachicago.com](http://www.rtachicago.com).

### PARATRANSIT

The RTA offers special travel options for persons who cannot ride public transportation due to disabilities. "Paratransit" is provided by specific carriers depending on your geographic area. These carriers can pick up a disabled person at their home, bring them to a destination, and make the return trip. **CALL:** (312) 663-4357; for deaf or hard of hearing: TTY (312) 913-3122.

### TAXI ACCESS PROGRAM

The Taxi Access Program only operates in Chicago (though it is administered by PACE). Riders receive a TAP card; riders pay only \$3 for one-way taxi rides worth up to \$20 per ride. **CALL:** (800) 606-1282, choose "4" when prompted, or **VISIT:** [www.pacebus.com/sub/paratransit/tap.asp](http://www.pacebus.com/sub/paratransit/tap.asp).

## Legal Services

### CATHOLIC CHARITIES LEGAL ASSISTANCE (CCLA)

CCLA offers a wide range of legal resources to low income individuals who otherwise could not afford an attorney. CCLA assesses clients' legal needs and directs them to the appropriate resources, clinics, and/or pro bono (free) attorneys. CCLA may also provide appropriate

legal advice to clients. Legal assistance is free to those whose household incomes are below 200% of federal poverty guidelines. For clients whose earnings are up to 400% of federal poverty guidelines a minimal one-time fee of \$25 to \$35 may apply. **CALL:** (312) 948-6821 or **VISIT:** [www.catholiccharities.net/ccla](http://www.catholiccharities.net/ccla).

## Veterans Benefits

### VETERANS RIGHTS BUREAU

The Veterans Rights Bureau ensures that veterans receive the benefits they have earned. They also publish a free, annual guide to veterans' rights that they will mail to you. **CALL:** (800) 382-3000 or **VISIT:** [www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/rights/veterans.html](http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/rights/veterans.html).

### ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs helps veterans and their families understand federal, state, and local resources and benefits available to them. **CALL IN CHICAGO:** (312) 814-2460, **ILLINOIS:** (800) 437-9824, or **VISIT:** [www2.illinois.gov/veterans](http://www2.illinois.gov/veterans).

### CATHOLIC CHARITIES SERVICES FOR VETERANS

Catholic Charities offers a range of services for veterans, including food, housing, counseling, and employment assistance. **CALL:** (312) 655-7700 or **VISIT:** <http://bit.ly/CCVeterans>.