

# COVID-19 GUIDE TO BENEFIT PROGRAMS

The information in this guide is up to date as of April 28, 2020.

With ongoing impact of COVID-19 still not fully understood by the community at large, individuals with disabilities who regularly access a series of public benefits are left with questions about the impact of the various federal and state legislative and administrative actions on these benefits. Key language in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) serves as a guidepost from which the impact on benefits can be better understood.

## STIMULUS PAYMENTS (one-time payments)

### Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Individuals who are receiving SSI need to be aware of several key elements related to the stimulus payment:

1. Stimulus payments are NOT taxable.
2. Stimulus payments received by the individual that are initiated through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) will not count as income in the calculation of the individual's SSI amount for that month.
3. Stimulus payments will not be counted as resources for a 12-month period following the receipt of the funds.
4. SSI recipients will receive the stimulus payment, even if they did not file a tax return. However, for benefit recipients with dependents, who did NOT file a tax return in 2018 or 2019, an extra step is needed. Go to [IRS Economic Impact Payments](#) on IRS.gov and provide the information needed in the Non-Filers section. This will ensure they receive the \$500 per dependent payment in addition to their \$1,200 individual payment.

### Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Disabled Widow(er) Benefits (DWB), Childhood Disability Benefits (CDB)

The stimulus payment will have no impact on any of these Title II benefits: SSDI, DWB, CDB, and SSA Retirement. These benefits are classified as insurance benefits and are NOT impacted by unearned income. In addition, the stimulus payments will NOT be taxable.

### Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

There is no impact on SNAP benefits due to the receipt of a stimulus payment in accordance with 26 U.S. Code § 6409.

### Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

There is no impact on HUD rent subsidies due to the receipt of the stimulus funds. The one-time stimulus payments paid to individuals and families would be excluded from income, as they are temporary, non-recurring payments (per 24 CFR 5.609). Please contact your local housing authority if you have any questions.

HUD has also extended a “tailored set of mortgage payment relief options for single family homeowners with FHA-insured mortgages”. “Effective immediately for borrowers with a financial hardship that makes them unable to pay their mortgage due to the COVID-19 National Emergency, mortgage servicers must extend deferred or reduced mortgage payment options - called forbearance - for up to six months, and must provide an additional six months of forbearance if requested by the borrower”.

### **Medicaid**

Medicaid recipients who received benefits before the COVID-19 crisis or become eligible during the crisis cannot be terminated from Medicaid. On a case by case basis, states may change the category or eligibility, e.g., from regular Medicaid to 1619(b) or Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities (MAWD), but terminations of coverage will not be allowed.

### **Medicare**

The stimulus payment will have no impact on Medicare premiums or eligibility. Medicare Savings Plans (MSPs), those programs that Medicaid is paying Medicare premiums for Parts B and D, and in some cases co-pays and deductibles, will also not be impacted by the stimulus payments in accordance with above language (26 U.S. Code § 6409).

### **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**

In accordance with the language in 26 U.S. Code § 6409, the stimulus payment will have no impact on TANF eligibility or resource levels for a 12-month period from receipt of the funds.

### **Veterans Affairs (VA) Pension**

In accordance with the language in 26 U.S. Code § 6409, the stimulus payment will have no impact on VA Pension eligibility or resource levels for a 12-month period from receipt of the funds.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS)**

### **Unemployment Insurance (UI)**

In South Dakota, you are likely eligible for UI if you meet the following criteria:

- Are an employee with reduced hours or wages (including hourly and tipped employees) OR have been furloughed and will be returning to your job.
- Are an employee that has been laid off permanently with no intention of returning to your job.
- Are an employee that has exhausted regular unemployment benefits.
- Are self-employed, independent contractor or receive a 1099 whose income has been drastically reduced due to COVID-19.

Go to the South Dakota Department of Labor & Regulation [website](#) for the most up-to-date information or to apply.

### Important Facts:

- UI has been extended beyond the “normal” 26 weeks to 39 weeks. This extension will end December 31, 2020, regardless of the number of weeks over your state’s maximum that have been received.
- The federal government will add \$600 per week to the maximum state UI benefit paid for 4 months until July 31, 2020. Thus, if your state maximum payment is \$250 per week, the weekly check will be \$850. There appears to be no variation in payment for those not receiving the maximum so we must assume, until we receive other information, that the \$600 per week will be added to all UI amounts paid by the state.
- The work search requirement has been suspended.

### Unemployment Benefits and SSI

- SSI recipients who qualify for unemployment will have their unemployment benefits counted towards their monthly benefit. They will keep their Medicaid; their cash benefit will just be suspended. If the amount of countable income goes below the full benefit rate, a call will need to be made to Social Security to get the benefit reinstated once they are no longer receiving unemployment benefits and/or they return to work.
- Resources at the time the pandemic is lifted will then start to count towards the resource limit.
- Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts would be a good option to be able to save any extra money and not have them count toward SSI resource rules.

### Unemployment Benefits and SSDI, CDB, DWB

- Since unemployment benefits are considered unearned income, they will have no effect on a person’s SSDI, CDB or DWB benefits.

### Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

- The amount of unemployment benefits that an individual receives from their state unemployment WILL be counted by their housing authority. However, the extra \$600 weekly pandemic amount will NOT be counted. Make sure that you are contacting your local housing authority to report any income you receive. They will then determine how it will affect your monthly housing payment.

### Sources:

- [Cornell University COVID-19 and Social Insurance and Benefit Programs](#)
- [Social Security Administration & Covid 19](#)
- [South Dakota Department of Labor & Regulation Reemployment](#)
- [Virginia Commonwealth University FAQs](#)

Please visit our South Dakota Benefits Specialist Network [Website](#) and [Facebook](#) page for more information!