



BACKGROUND

Our nation’s Social Security system includes Social Security Old Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI), Social Security Disability Insurance (DI or SSDI), and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Together these programs provide insurance and income that improves the lives of nearly all Americans. Currently, over 67 million people receive benefits from Social

67M

PEOPLE RECEIVE BENEFITS FROM SOCIAL SECURITY, SSI, OR BOTH

Security, SSI, or both — including nearly 14 million people with disabilities and their spouses and children.

Key Points

Social Security And SSI

- Millions of people with disabilities receive Social Security retirement, disability, and survivor benefits and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- People with disabilities would be hurt if changes are made to cut benefits or eligibility.
- Improve Social Security and SSI by addressing asset limits, marriage penalties, and other critical issues.

Social Security’s OASI and DI programs protect workers against poverty in retirement or in the event of a work-related disability, and provide monthly benefits for certain workers’ dependents and survivors. Additionally, spouses and children, including adult children with disabilities, may receive benefits based on the earnings record of a spouse or parent. People with disabilities and their families access benefits under all parts of the Social Security system, and all parts of Social Security are important to people with disabilities. Social Security benefits are paid from two Trust Funds (one for OASI and one for DI), which are

funded with payroll contributions paid by both employees and employers.

Social Security’s SSI program provides monthly benefits to ensure income for people who are aged, blind, or have disabilities and have very low income and assets. Over 8 million people receive SSI, including nearly 6 million children and adults with disabilities. Funding for SSI comes from general government revenues and is not a trust fund.

KEY ISSUES

People with disabilities and their families have an enormous interest in any proposed Social Security or SSI changes. These issues are bipartisan. All policymakers must address the concerns of people with disabilities and their families.

Future Challenges for the Trust Funds: By law, Social Security’s OASDI Trust Funds must be able to pay benefits for at least the next 75 years. Social Security is currently running a planned surplus to address the retirement and disability needs in the coming years. Social Security’s reserves were \$2.89 trillion at the end of 2017. In 2018, Social Security’s Trustees projected that, without any changes, the combined Trust Funds could pay full scheduled benefits until 2034 and would then cover about 79 percent of scheduled benefits. The Trustees project that on its own, the DI Trust Fund can pay full scheduled benefits through 2032.

Congress will need to act before then to ensure that the DI Trust Fund continues to pay all promised benefits. House Social Security Subcommittee Chair, John Larson (D-CT) and Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) have introduced legislation (see below) to extend solvency through 2100 and improve benefits.

Cuts to Social Security and SSI Must Be Rejected: Unfortunately, cuts to Social Security and SSI benefits and eligibility have been proposed in recent years. Congress should reject proposals to cut Social Security and SSI. SSI benefits are extremely modest, averaging only about \$550 per month, but are important in helping people meet their basic needs and pay for medical care and disability-related costs. SSI can make all the difference in helping a low-income family raise a child with a disability or helping an adult with a disability to live in the community. Congress should also consider how any proposed changes to Social Security or SSI hurts or helps people who receive benefits before making any changes. This is referred to as a beneficiary impact statement.

Improvements Needed: Many parts of the Social Security and SSI disability systems need to be strengthened to better meet the needs of people with disabilities. These include:

- Increasing the amount a person can earn and continue to receive benefits — known as the substantial gainful activity (SGA) level for people with disabilities (currently \$1,220 per month) — to the level for people who are blind (currently \$2,040 per month);
- Increasing the asset limits and income exclusions for SSI;
- Eliminating marriage penalties for people with disabilities;
- Improving work incentives which encourage people to work while receiving benefits; and
- Addressing policy issues which have a harsh impact on people eligible for OASDI benefits as disabled adult children.

The Social Security 2100 Act (S. 269, H.R. 860) provides a modest across-the-board benefit increase for all beneficiaries, improves annual cost of living adjustments, reduces taxes for 10 million Social Security beneficiaries, and establishes a new minimum benefit at 125% of the poverty line.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Congress should reject any cuts to Social Security or SSI, including any proposals to cut benefits or limit who can qualify.
- Congress should pass the Social Security 2100 Act, S. 269, H.R. 860 to extend solvency and make benefit improvements.
- Congress should address the many other areas in which improvements are needed in the Social Security and SSI disability programs.
- Congress should request a beneficiary impact statement on any proposal to change Social Security or SSI, to look beyond budgetary issues to the impact on people's daily lives.

For more information, please contact The Arc at (202) 783-2229, Association of University Centers on Disabilities at (301) 588-8252, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities at (202) 387-1968, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities at (202) 506-5813, Self Advocates Becoming Empowered at SABEnation@gmail.com, or United Cerebral Palsy at (202) 973-7185.