



Fact Sheet

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI): What's the difference?



There is often confusion about Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) because you apply for both programs with the Social Security Administration. **But, the programs are different.** The Social Security benefit programs are “entitlement” programs. This means that workers, employers and the self-employed pay for the benefits with their Social Security taxes. The taxes that are collected are put into special trust funds. You qualify for these benefits based on your work history (or your spouse or parent). The amount of the benefit is based on these earnings.

SSI is a needs-based program for people with limited income and resources. Resources are assets or things that you own. The program is paid for by general tax revenues -- not from the Social Security trust funds. The benefit amount is based on Federal and State laws which take into account where you live, who lives with you and what income you receive.

Look at the chart below to help you understand the difference between the two programs.

Social Security

- **Benefits based on earnings**
- **Financed by employer and wage contributions**
- **No income limit**
- **No resource limit**
- **Must have enough work credits**
- **Medicare**
- **Benefit Types:**
 - Retirement (age 62 & older)
 - Survivor
 - Disability (includes blindness)
- **Provides benefits to eligible family members**
- **Benefit amount based on average lifetime earnings**
- **Other income does NOT affect benefits**
(Except wages may affect benefits under full retirement age or disability benefits)
- **Where you live or who lives with you does NOT affect benefits**

SSI

- **Benefits based on need**
- **Financed by General Revenues**
- **Limited income**
- **Limited resources**
- **No work credits are required**
- **Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California)**
- **Benefit Types:**
 - Aged (age 65 and older)
 - Disability (any age, includes children)
 - Blindness (any age, includes children)
- **No family benefits**
- **Benefit amount based on Federal and State laws**
- **Other income MAY affect benefits – report any income you receive**
- **Where you live or who lives with you MAY affect benefits – report all changes**

Social Security and SSI: What's the difference? – continued



Social Security

Question:

Mary, a Native American elder, is 67-years old and receives retirement benefits. She retired from her job after working 30 years. She receives \$600 per month. Her daughter and grandson move into her home. Does Mary have to report this to Social Security?

Answer:

No. Mary does not have to report a change in her living arrangements. Social Security benefits are not affected if someone moves into or out of your home or if you move into or out of someone's home.

Question:

Mary just received her quarterly per capita distribution from her tribe's Revenue Sharing Trust Fund. Does she need to report this to Social Security?

Answer:

No. Mary does not need to report her per capita distribution. Mary only needs to report her wages if she returns to work. **SOMETIMES** earnings from work affect Social Security benefits. A representative will tell you if your earnings will affect your check.

SSI

Question:

John and Lilly, Native American elders, are both 68-years old. They have been receiving SSI benefits for 2 years. Last week, John and Lilly moved in with their son. They both have direct deposit. Do they have to report to Social Security that they now live with their son?

Answer:

Yes. If you receive SSI payments you must report changes in your living arrangements right away. The report must be made to Social Security and not your tribal social worker.

Question:

John just received his quarterly per capita distribution from his tribe's Revenue Sharing Trust Fund. Does he need to report this to Social Security?

Answer:

Yes. John is required to report ALL income he receives from ANY source. Social Security representatives will determine if the income will affect his SSI payments. Since per capita distributions vary by tribe, there are different rules for each type of distribution. When in doubt, report the income to Social Security.

Some people receive both Social Security and SSI benefits. Anytime you receive SSI you must report changes in your living arrangements and income. **Social Security representatives are your best source for information.** If you have any questions about your benefits, or you are not sure if you receive Social Security or SSI, please call us toll-free at 1-800-772-1213. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have. You may also call or visit your local Social Security office. To find out the address of your local office you may call our toll-free number or visit our website at www.socialsecurity.gov.