

What Prisoners Should Know About Social Security



Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments generally are not payable for months that you are confined to a jail, prison or certain other public institutions for commission of a crime. And, you are not eligible for Social Security or SSI payments automatically when you are released.

Who can get Social Security benefits?

Social Security disability benefits can be paid to people who have recently worked and paid Social Security taxes and are unable to work because of a serious medical condition that is expected to last at least a year or result in death. The fact that a person is a recent parolee or is unemployed does not qualify as a disability.

Social Security retirement benefits can be paid to people who are 62 or older. Generally, you must have worked and paid Social Security taxes for 10 years to be eligible.

Social Security benefits are not paid for the months you have been sentenced to a jail, prison or correctional facility or confined to certain public institutions for committing a crime. And, no benefits can be paid for any month in which you violate a condition of your probation or parole.

Although you cannot receive monthly Social Security benefit payments while you are confined, your spouse or children can be paid benefits on your record if they are eligible.

And if you have worked and paid Social Security taxes, survivors benefits also may be paid to certain family members if you die.

Who can get SSI payments?

SSI can be paid to people who are 65 or older, or who are blind or disabled and whose income and resources are below certain limits. No benefits are payable for any month in which you reside in a jail, prison or certain other public institutions.

Also, you cannot receive an SSI payment for any month in which you violate a condition of your probation or parole.

When you are ready to be released

If your Social Security or SSI benefits were suspended because you were incarcerated, you can request that they be started again when you are released from prison. You will need to contact Social Security and provide a copy of your release documents before we can take action on your request.

If you were not receiving benefits prior to your incarceration or your benefits were terminated, you will need to file a new application for benefits if you think you may be eligible. You should contact Social Security for more information about filing a claim for benefits. We will require proof of your release from prison, in addition to a new application and other documents.

If your institution has a prerelease agreement with the local Social Security office, it will notify us if you are likely to meet the requirements for SSI or Social Security benefits. We can then process an application several months before your anticipated release so that benefits can start as soon as possible after your release. You should contact institutional or social service staff to find out if the institution has a prerelease agreement with Social Security.

If there is no agreement, when you know your anticipated release date, contact Social Security to apply for benefits if you think you may be eligible. Then we can take prompt action on your application.

Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at www.socialsecurity.gov or call toll-free, **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We can provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We treat all calls confidentially. We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.