Increasing access to federal disability benefits

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are federal benefits that provide extra income to people who cannot keep a job because of a disability. A disability is a medical condition that prevents you from working and is expected to last one year or more. Advocacy services to help apply for federal disability benefits are available.

Advocacy services

Social Security advocacy helps people who are on state public assistance programs apply for SSI and SSDI disability benefits. SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) is a national program designed to increase access to SSI and SSDI for eligible adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services provides support to its Social Security and SOAR advocacy providers by:

- Training advocates on how to complete SSI/SSDI disability applications so that they meet Social Security Administration requirements
- Paying them for their advocacy work
- Providing a secure, online payment system to manage clients and submit invoices
- Developing regional workgroups to identify and address barriers
- Providing case consultations and ongoing training
- Documenting successes and identifying areas for improvement and growth
- Collaborating with state and local stakeholders.

Helping those on state public assistance programs

Social Security advocacy providers work with people on the following public assistance programs: Diversionary Work Program, General Assistance (GA), Housing Support, Minnesota Family Investment Program, Refugee Cash Assistance and Title IV-E Foster Care.

In 2017:

- 1,719 people applied for SSI, SSDI or both with the help of a Social Security advocate.
- 814 people were approved for SSI, SSDI or both with the help of a Social Security advocate.
- Social Security advocacy services recovered $2.9 million for Minnesota’s Interim Assistance fund, which helps people receive GA and/or Housing Support benefits while they wait to get SSI.
Providing services to those in greatest need

SOAR advocates provide intensive advocacy services and focus on a person’s initial SSI/SSDI application. In state fiscal year 2017:

- 186 people applied for SSI, SSDI or both with the help of a SOAR advocate.
- Seventy-six percent of those who were homeless before applying found housing after applying or getting benefits.
- SOAR advocacy services recovered $152,209 for Minnesota’s Interim Assistance fund, which seeks repayment of GA and/or Housing Support benefits when a client receives SSI/SSDI back pay.

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