

# Guide for Displaced Workers

*Electronic Version*



Securing today  
and tomorrow

## Introduction

Social Security is your portable pension. Throughout your working career, you have earned Social Security retirement, disability, and survivor benefits, plus Medicare health coverage for you and your family. The purpose of this guide is to provide displaced workers with useful information as you make critical decisions about your future, Social Security, and Medicare. While it specifically addresses retirement and disability benefits on your own work record, you and/or your family members may be eligible for benefits as a [spouse](#), [dependent child](#), [Disabled Adult Child](#), or as a [survivor](#). This guide and [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) go hand in hand.

## Your Social Security Number and Card

The Social Security Administration (SSA) uses your nine-digit Social Security number (SSN) to accurately record the covered wages and/or self-employment income for all workers. In most cases, knowing your Social Security number is enough, but if you are job hunting and are hired by a different company, your new employer may require you to show your Social Security card for wage reporting purposes. If you have lost or misplaced your card, the easiest way to get a replacement card is with your personal [my Social Security](#) account. The [online replacement card request](#) is available to residents of most states and the District of Columbia.

If you cannot use the online application, you can request a replacement card by mail or by visiting a local Social Security office or card center. You can download the required form, the [SS-5](#), from Social Security's website. Whether you apply for a replacement card by mail or in person, you must show [original documents](#), including recent proof of your identity, with the completed SS-5 form.

Protect your Social Security card and number from loss and identity theft. **DO NOT** carry it with you. Keep it in a secure location and only take it with you when you must show the card. Use caution in giving out your Social Security number and other personal data. For other tips, see the pamphlet, [Identity Theft and Your Social Security Number](#).

## The [my Social Security](#) Account

The [my Social Security](#) account is your online gateway to Social Security. Convenient and easy to use, it provides secure access to many online services. If you do not have a [my Social Security](#) account, register for one today. For step-by-step instructions, review the fact sheet, [my Social Security – How to Create an Online Account](#).

Social Security is regularly adding to the [online services](#) available through [my Social Security](#). The account is a useful, timesaving resource whether you currently receive Social Security or Medicare benefits or if you don't receive benefits yet.

**SSA.gov**



## Your *Social Security Statement*

You can access, save, and print your *Social Security Statement*, a valuable financial planning tool, from within your personal *my Social Security* account. SSA used to mail the *Statement* every year a few months before your birthday. Today the agency only mails the document to individuals 60 and older who do not have a *my Social Security* account and are not collecting benefits.

Your Social Security benefits are based on your recorded wages, so it is important to review your earnings record. If any of your earnings are incorrect or missing, this could mean lower Social Security benefits for you and your family. We can make corrections, if necessary. For instructions, see the fact sheet, *How to Correct Your Social Security Earnings Record*.

Your *Statement* shows whether you have enough *credits* to qualify for benefits. The document lists estimated amounts for retirement and disability benefits for you (the worker) and your dependent family members, as well as survivors benefits for your spouse and dependent child(ren) at your death. The *Statement* also shows whether you have enough credits to qualify for Medicare.

### Retirement Benefits

Employers collect Social Security taxes (also known as OASDI or FICA) from your paycheck and report your earnings to us. Workers can earn up to four credits a year based on their work. To be eligible for retirement and Medicare benefits, you need to have earned 40 credits, usually about 10 years of work. The amount of your retirement benefit is based on how much you earned during your lifetime.

The *full retirement age* (FRA), also called “normal retirement age,” was 65 for many years. Federal law raised the full retirement age beginning with people born in 1938 or later. The retirement age gradually increases by a few months for every birth year, until it reaches 67 for people born in 1960 and later. The longer you wait to collect your Social Security benefits, the higher your monthly benefit will be. The *Retirement Calculator* in your personal *my Social Security* account allows you to compare your individualized retirement benefit estimates at age 62, FRA, and age 70 with various scenarios you select.

### Disability Benefits

Social Security Disability benefits provide coverage for severely disabled workers and their dependents. To qualify for *Social Security Disability Insurance* (SSDI), a worker must meet certain medical requirements. To be considered disabled, workers must have a medical condition(s) so severe that it prevents them from working, at any job, at a level that is considered substantial and gainful. *Substantial Gainful Activity* (SGA) is based on earnings. In addition, the condition(s) must be expected to last at least 12 months or end in the worker’s death. Social Security does not pay partial or temporary benefits.

If you are disabled but do not have enough credits to qualify for SSDI and you have limited income and resources, you may be eligible for *Supplemental Security Income*. SSI is a federal income supplement program funded by general tax revenues, not Social Security taxes.

## Medicare

[Medicare](#) is the federal government's health insurance program for people 65 and older. Certain people younger than 65 can qualify for Medicare, too, including those with disabilities and those who have End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD). As a displaced worker, you may have lost your employer health insurance. If you (or your spouse) are 65 or older, you are probably eligible for Medicare. You should apply for [Medicare](#) as soon as possible.

If you already have Medicare Part A and wish to sign up for Part B under a Special Enrollment Period (SEP), you have one of three options: online, fax, and mail. Your enrollment will be expedited if you complete the online application, [Apply Online for Medicare Part B During a Special Enrollment Period](#). You will be asked to upload documentation verifying your coverage under a Group Health Plan (GHP) or Large Group Health Plan (LGHP). The application provides a list of acceptable evidence. You must complete the online application in one sitting and use a digital signature, which requires a **valid** email. If you and your spouse are both applying for Part B under an SEP, you must file separate applications. If you choose not to file online, complete the forms [CMS-40B](#) (Application for Enrollment in Medicare - Part B) and [CMS-L564](#) (Request for Employment Information), fax them to **1-833-914-2016**, or mail them to your local Social Security office. If your employer cannot sign the CMS-L564, SSA can use other evidence. For more information, see the fact sheet, [How to Apply for Medicare Part B During Your Special Enrollment Period](#). You will pay a monthly premium for Part B.

Other [resources](#) are available as you make decisions about Medicare. For example, every state has a [State Health Insurance Assistance Program](#) to help you, at no charge, navigate your choices with unbiased state-specific guidance. Additional information can be found at [Medicare.gov](#).

If you (or your spouse) are younger than 65 and ineligible for Medicare, you have other health insurance options: [COBRA](#) (that may allow you to continue an employer health plan at your expense), the [Affordable Care Act](#), the Veterans Administration, or [Medicaid](#). SSA employees are unable to answer questions about these programs.

## How Breaks In Earnings Affect Social Security Benefits

### Retirement Benefits

[Social Security bases your benefits on your lifetime earnings](#). Social Security adjusts or “indexes” all of your actual earnings to account for changes in average wages. Your benefit is determined by using your 35 highest years of “indexed” earnings. If you have fewer than 35 years of earnings, we calculate your benefit using a zero (0) for each year without earnings.

### Disability Benefits

In addition to the medical requirements, a disabled worker must meet the *non-medical requirement* to be eligible for SSDI. To qualify, the worker must have earned [credits](#) through **recent** work. A worker age 31 or older must have earned at least 20 credits in the 10 years before becoming disabled. Workers younger than 31 can qualify with fewer credits. A worker can earn up to four credits per year, and the [amount of earnings needed for a credit changes from year to year](#).

## Social Security and Unemployment Compensation

If you receive unemployment compensation and you become entitled to Social Security benefits on your own work record or on the record of another (such as a living or deceased spouse), your Social Security will not be reduced. Any reduction in your unemployment benefit if you are also collecting Social Security is determined by state law. Contact your state's Department of Labor.

## Social Security and Workers' Compensation and Other Public Disability Benefits

Workers receive workers' compensation due to a job-related injury or illness. Payments are issued by federal or state workers' compensation agencies, insurance companies, or employers. [Workers' compensation and other public disability benefits](#) may reduce your Social Security. Other [public disability payments](#) that **may** affect your Social Security benefit are those paid by a government agency for a medical condition that is not related to your job.

Other important points:

- The reduction in your Social Security benefits stops at full retirement age.
- If you receive a lump-sum payment or the amount of your workers' compensation changes, inform SSA so we can adjust your Social Security benefit amount, if necessary.
- Disability payments from a private pension, insurance benefits, or other sources, do not affect your Social Security benefit.

## Applying for Benefits

When you decide to apply for benefits, use the [Checklist for Online Medicare, Retirement, & Spouses Applications](#) or [Checklist for Online Adult Disability Application](#) to help you prepare. If you are filing for disability benefits, you may wish to review and print the adult [Disability Starter Kit](#). The easiest way to file for benefits is to use the online application for [Retirement](#) or [Disability](#). If you are disabled and at least 62 but younger than full retirement age, you can file for retirement and disability benefits with the same application. The advantages are you have almost immediate income with the reduced retirement benefit while we make a decision on your disability claim. If approved, your monthly disability benefit would be higher than your reduced retirement. You cannot apply online for [survivors benefits](#).

If you are filing for retirement no more than three months before your 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, your retirement application is also your application for Medicare A and B. If you are at least 65 but are not ready to take your Social Security benefit, you can apply online for [Medicare only](#). Before you start your retirement benefit, you should review the fact sheet, [Retirement Information for Medicare Beneficiaries](#).

You can [check the status](#) of your benefit application with your personal [my Social Security](#) account. Other [online services](#) include a searchable database of [Frequently Asked Questions](#), where you can find answers to many of your questions. You can find plenty of information on our website, [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov), including:

- [If I find another job, can I stop my Social Security benefits?](#)
- [Can I work and get Social Security retirement or survivors benefits?](#)
- [Can I return to work while getting disability benefits?](#)

For more information about Social Security's programs and benefits or to schedule an appointment to speak with a claims representative, call Social Security's toll-free number, **1-800-772-1213**. If you still need to visit an office, you can use our [office locator to find your local office](#).