

# Government Benefits – FAQ

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**AN ATTEMPT TO ANSWER PARENTS’ ONGOING QUESTIONS ABOUT GOVERNMENT BENEFITS FOR THEIR CHILDREN ON THE SPECTRUM.**

“**G**overnment benefits” is such a broad term. These benefits can vary from individual to individual, but some tend to be universal for most individuals with an Intellectual and Developmental Disability.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid are two such benefits. These benefits require that the individual has very little assets and income in order to qualify, but they are the gateway to many services and options.

SSI will provide a monthly income, and Medicaid provides healthcare as well as many long-term support and services that allow individuals with special needs to live and thrive in the community!

Most individuals do not qualify for SSI and Medicaid until they turn 18. The reason for this is because before the age of 18, Social Security and Medicaid consider the income and assets of the parents (of the child with a disability) when determining financial eligibility. However, once the individual turns 18, they are considered a legal adult, and therefore the finances of the parents are no longer considered in the application for SSI and Medicaid.

This is why it is so important to have a clear understanding of the necessary financial structure that must be in place to ensure that your loved one can always qualify for these benefits.



## How can my child receive the maximum amount of SSI?

For so many individuals with a disability, age 18 is critical. At age 18, your child becomes an adult in the world of government benefits. This means only their income and assets are considered by Social Security when they apply for SSI.

As long as you have no custodial accounts (UTMA, UGMA), no savings or checking accounts, no Roth IRA, no investment accounts, nothing titled in their name—then they will qualify from a financial perspective. This means if they have a qualifying disability, then they can be approved for SSI. SSI (Supplemental Security Income) is a monthly income.

Once approved for SSI, if the individual is living with their parents or guardian, they will receive two-thirds of the maximum amount. In order to be approved for the maximum SSI benefit, the parent or guardian must charge their loved one rent (or a portion of expenses).

Charging rent requires additional paperwork and conversation with Social Security after your loved one is initially approved. It may take some extra effort and time, but it will be worth it!!

## If my adult child with a disability has a job, where can he save money that will not disqualify him from benefits?

I have had so many parents call me so excited that their child is working part-time and is eligible to save money in the company 401(k). I immediately cringe, because I know that at some time in the near future, that account will jeopardize his/her government benefits and services. 401(k)s, like checking, savings, investment, and many other types of accounts, will count against your loved one in calculation toward the asset resource limit for qualification to keep his/her benefits.

The one account that is safe for your child to save his/her money in is an ABLE Account. The value inside of an ABLE account does not count towards the asset resource limit to keep government benefits. This means your child can continue to save money inside of an ABLE Account and not be concerned with the accumulated value inside (until it reaches \$100,000). It will not negatively impact your child's government benefits.

## What are Medicaid Waiver programs?

Medicaid waiver programs provide services that allow individuals to live in the community instead of being forced to live in an institution. The waivers are state-specific and permit states to provide services to a targeted group of individuals, specific geographic locations, select service providers, and to provide services to individuals who may

not otherwise qualify under the existing Medicaid rules. This means that children under the age of 18 who live with their parents can qualify for services through a waiver program within their state.

Each state can have multiple Medicaid Waiver programs that serve different purposes. There are some waiver programs that can have a long waiting list before your loved one gets approved for services, but please don't be deterred. These Waivers provide services like the following: help finding proper housing, supporting them in the search for employment, connecting them with day programs or volunteer work, providing assistive technology, and even providing services for caregivers (including respite).



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