

## How does Medicare work with Social Security disability benefits?

If you receive **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)**, you automatically qualify for **Medicare**. However, you may have to wait to receive that benefit.

The federal Medicare program primarily serves people 65 and older but is also available for adults under age 65 who have a disability. Most SSDI recipients qualify for Medicare 24 months after the date they become eligible for disability benefits. The 24 month waiting period is waived for people with certain conditions including: amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) or end-stage renal disease.

Aside from the waiting period, Medicare functions for individuals who have been awarded Social Security disability much as it does for eligible adults age 65 and older. You likely will not have to pay for Medicare Part A (hospitalization coverage) if you paid Medicare taxes while you were working. However, you will have **monthly premiums** for Part B (physician and outpatient services) and for a **Part D prescription drug plan** if you opt to enroll in one. These costs may be deducted from your SSDI benefit.

## How the waiting period works

The Social Security Administration (SSA) counts each month in which you are entitled to receive an SSDI payment toward the 24-month Medicare qualifying period.

There is also a waiting period for SSDI payments to begin, lasting five full calendar months after the month in which SSA determines that your disability began. That means, in most cases, you become eligible for Medicare 29 months after what Social Security calls the “date of onset” of your disability.

Remember, though, that your onset date can be before you filed for SSDI or were approved for benefits (a process that typically takes several months and can go much longer if it involves appealing an initial denial of benefits). Social Security

may pay up to 12 months of retroactive benefits if it determines, based on the medical evidence, that your disability predated your application filing date.

The months when you were entitled to SSDI but had not yet been approved to receive it count toward the Medicare waiting period. For example, if you applied for SSDI on Sept. 10, 2021, eight months after a chronic illness made you unable to work and Social Security approves your claim in February 2022, with a finding that January 10, 2021, is the date your disability began, your benefit entitlement, then, will begin in July 2021, the sixth calendar month after your onset date. You would get seven months of retroactive payments (for the period of benefit eligibility that predated your claim approval) and become eligible for Medicare in July 2023, 17 months after you received a decision from the SSA.

## **If you go back to work**

Medicare coverage linked to receiving SSDI will end if benefits stop because your condition improves to the point that Social Security no longer considers you disabled. The SSA does periodic reviews to determine your continuing medical eligibility for benefits.

SSDI can also end if, while still meeting the medical criteria for disability, you are able to work and your income exceeds a limit known as substantial gainful activity (SGA). In 2022, the limit is \$1,350 per month gross. If you earn more, you can lose your benefits. You may, however, not lose Medicare coverage. Social Security offers incentives to help disabled beneficiaries make the transition back to the workforce, including continuing Medicare coverage in some instances.

For example, you will not lose SSDI or Medicare benefits during a trial work period, an incentive that lets you earn more than the SGA limit for any nine months over a five-year period. If you are working at or above SGA level when the trial period ends, you will lose SSDI benefits but can remain on Medicare and pay no Part A premiums for 93 consecutive months (seven years and nine months), as long as you still have a qualifying disability.

After that, you can remain on Medicare but will have to pay for Part A, until you turn 65 and become Medicare-eligible based on age.

## Keep in mind

- Medicare eligibility does not come with Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the other SSA-administered benefit for people with disabilities. SSI recipients in Connecticut do, however automatically qualify for Medicaid, the federal-state health insurance program for people with low incomes.
- SSDI beneficiaries waiting for their Medicare to start may be able to fill gaps in their health coverage by signing up for Medicaid, if they meet the program's qualifying criteria, through the Affordable Health Care Act, or through the State of Connecticut Husky health insurance program.
- If you are offered health insurance through an employer, you may be able to stay on Medicare so long as you remain medically disabled. Depending on the size of your workplace, Medicare might become the "secondary payer," meaning providers bill it for services your work-based insurance does not cover.