

Social Security Advocacy Services Newsletter

March/April 2022

Social Security Advocacy Services is dedicated to assisting Minnesotans with the Social Security disability benefits process so they can secure stable housing, live in dignity, and achieve their highest potential.

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Social Security Advocacy team member spotlight

We would like to introduce you to our newest team member, Jennifer Zallar.



Jennifer is the Social Security Advocacy Tribal and Northern Minnesota Coordinator. Jennifer joined the team in Oct. 2021 bringing with her over 11 years of experience working as a Social Security disability advocate. She is a licensed eligible for direct payment non-attorney (EDPNA) disability representative. Additionally, she has over 10 years of experience working in the medical field as a certified nursing assistant for a home health care agency and at a University Medical Center. She has always had a passion for helping others, either in a direct or non-direct care setting.

In her free time, Jennifer enjoys spending her time outdoors with her family, gardening, camping, fishing, and hunting. She loves animals and enjoys spending time taking care of her dogs, cats and horses. Additionally, she enjoys volunteering in her community and within the church she attends.

You can contact Jennifer at jennifer.zallar@state.mn.us or by calling 612-201-7386.

Grantee Spotlight

This section of our newsletter spotlights a Department of Human Services-contracted Social Security Advocacy grantee in hopes of fostering partnerships and open communication among all grantees.



Agency Name: Disability Specialists

Contact information: 800-642-6393 or 218-666-2676; info@disabilityspecialists.net

Website: www.disabilityspecialists.net

Service provided: Disability Specialists provides hands-on assistance with initial applications, reconsideration requests, hearings, and appeals. They serve all of the state of Minnesota as well as western Wisconsin, and eastern North and South Dakota.

Disability Specialists is a full service company that has helped the disabled population navigate the Social Security disability process since 1989. They serve as the liaison to the Social Security Administration staff and take the burden of communicating with them away from the client.

They prefer to start working with a potential client as early as possible in the Social Security disability application process so they can provide guidance to help make the claim as strong as possible from the very beginning. Additionally, they work with an attorney firm that will take on the appeal process post hearing, so they can prepare the claim for Federal District Court as early as possible.

At Disability Specialists, their services do not end after a client is approved. They contract with a Medicare company that helps clients find the best Medicare policy suitable, based on a client's needs. They also contract with another company that helps clients, who want to return to work, get back to work slowly, without losing their cash and medical benefits.

Interpreter services available



DHS' Social Security Advocacy team contracts each year with multiple state of Minnesota approved vendors who provide free interpreter services when helping a client apply for Social Security disability benefits. Grantees have the option of using the Language Line (phone interpreters), in person interpreters, and face-to-face American Sign Language interpreters.

Please save this [interpreter services instruction sheet](#) which instructs you on how to use the different interpreter services delivery options.

Social Security Advocacy Services payment system reports

Data entered in the Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) payment system is viewable by two separate reports. The SSAS system allows grantees to run an invoice report or a data report. The invoice report allows users to see detailed client invoice information including who submitted invoices, warrant numbers, and date paid. The data report is a more comprehensive report that provides all client information entered into the SSAS system as well as invoice information.



This [tip sheet](#) provides instructions on how to run and review the invoice and data reports in the SSAS payment system.

If you have additional questions, please contact the SSAS system administrator Ty Morris at: ty.morris@state.mn.us or call 651-431-6271.

2022 NOSSCR Annual Conference

The [National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives \(NOSCCR\) annual conference](#) in May 2022 features presentations by the following DHS contracted Social Security Advocacy grantees:

- Asha Sharma and Paul McGrath of Disability Partners on *Spotting Winning Cases: Tips for Interviewing Clients, Training Staff, and Referral Sources*.
- Laura Melnick and Nicole Mourgos of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, Inc. on *Strategies for Working with Clients with Mental Illness*.
- Thomas Krause of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services, Inc. on *Returning to Work Before an Award of Benefits: Don't Give up!*

NOSSCR's conference is a wonderful opportunity for grantees both new and experienced in the work of representing Social Security disability claimants.

Asha Sharma and Paul McGrath will present *Spotting Winning Cases: Tips for Interviewing Clients Training Staff, and Referral Sources* during our May Technical Assistance session on May 19th from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Watch your email for registration information.

Social Security updates



A new Online Protective Filing Tool

In an emergency message, [EM-22015](#), dated 3/18/2022, the Social Security Administration announced they have released into production an Online Protective Filing tool.

The [Online Protective Filing Tool](#) will ask for some basic information about the individual applying for a benefit and the request can be submitted by an individual interested in benefits for themselves, or by a representative of an individual.

In-Person services resume at local Social Security offices

Local Social Security offices' are now open for in-person services, including those without a scheduled appointment as of April 7, 2022. Social Security has implemented some safety measures when visiting their offices and they do anticipate delays and longer wait times in the office. They do advise that online services and telephone calls remain the most convenient ways to contact them. To read the full press release, please visit the [Social Security Press Office](#).

April is National Social Security month

The Social Security Administration has designated April as National Social Security month. To honor the Social Security Administration, here is an informative video, [A Hope of Many Years](#), which provides a brief history of the agency.

Self-Attestation of sex marker

The Social Security Administration recently announced that they will offer individuals the choice to self-select their sex on their Social Security number record. They anticipate this option to be available in the fall of 2022. To read the full press release, please visit the [Social Security Press Office](#).

Evaluating cases involving drug addiction and alcoholism

Have you ever wondered how Social Security evaluates disability claims that involve drug addiction and alcoholism (DAA) with co-occurring mental disorders? The law requires that if a claimant's drug addiction or alcoholism is a contributing factor material to disability, an individual is not considered disabled. To learn more, watch this [30 minute video](#) which presents an evidence-based approach to assessing DAA involving co-occurring mental disorders in accordance with [Social Security Ruling \(SSR\) 13-2p](#).

Social Security Advocacy Team trainings

Technical Assistance (TA) bi-monthly sessions

On the third **THURSDAY** in odd months from 1:30 to 3 p.m., the Social Security Advocacy team offers trainings and opportunities for Q&A to our contracted Social Security Advocates. Our next technical assistance training will be **Thursday, May 19, 2022**. Asha Sharma and Paul McGrath from Disability Partners will be presenting on *Spotting Winning Cases: Tips for Interviewing Clients, Training Staff, and Referral Sources*.



If you are interested in presenting at an upcoming TA session on any topic related to Social Security advocacy services, please contact Tony Reynero at antonio.reynero@state.mn.us.

Recent trainings

[Social Security Advocacy Technical Assistance \(TA\) session March 2022](#): *Social Security Disability Process Overview*, presented by Brian Rudolph from the Social Security Administration and Sara Dicks from the Disability Determination Services. This [training hand out](#) was provided for the TA session.

[Social Security Advocacy Services Training](#): Presented in January 2022 as a live WebEx training session about the roles and responsibilities of DHS-contracted grantees based on contract language. This [training handout](#) was provided for the presentation.

[Social Security Advocacy Services Payment System](#): Learn the basics of how to register, use, and submit invoices via the Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) Payment System.

Tip Sheets

[Eligibility to apply for Social Security disability benefits](#) discusses how an individual must meet certain criteria to apply for Social Security disability benefits.

[Social Security Advocacy Services eligibility criteria](#) lists the required criteria that grantees must use based upon their current contract with DHS.

If you have suggestions for training topics, or would like more information about our trainings, please contact DHS.SSAadvocacy@state.mn.us.

Minnesota conferences and events



Each year organizations across Minnesota have informative conferences that you may want to attend or have a booth at. This is a great networking and educational opportunity for you and your agency. DHS cannot endorse any of these conferences, nor are you required to attend any of the conferences.

[Minnesota Social Service Association](#) (MSSA) annual conference was held in March 2022.

[Saint Louis County Health & Human Services Conference](#) 40th Annual Training Conference & Expo, Oct. 12-14, 2022. This year's theme is Come Together; Community, Unity and Hope.

[Minnesota Financial Worker and Case Aide Association](#) (MFWCAA) annual conference Oct. 19-21, 2022.

[Minnesota Age & Disabilities Odyssey Conference](#) will host two free webinars in April and June 2022.

Social Security Administration important websites

[My Social Security](#) is a free and secure account that provides personalized tools for everyone, whether you receive benefits or not. You can use your account to request a replacement Social Security card, check the status of an application, estimate future benefits or manage the benefits you already receive. This is a great resource



tool for your clients to receive updates regarding their disability claims and benefits.

[Social Security Online Services](#) is the main webpage for online services. Here you can find the links to apply for disability benefits, appeal a decision, plus many more online features provided by the Social Security Administration.

[Social Security Office Locator](#) is a tool where you can enter a zip code to find an individual's local SSA office and contact information.

[Compassionate Allowances](#) are a way to quickly identify diseases and other medical conditions that, by definition, meet Social Security's standards for disability benefits. If you believe that your client meets this definition, you should include a comment in the remarks section of their disability application or appeal. This will then alert Social Security of this serious condition, which will then prompt them to expedite the application or appeal you are submitting.

[SSI COLA Fact Sheet](#) commonly referred to as COLA, contains the 2022 cost-of-living adjustments and financial thresholds that you should be aware of.

[Social Security Forms](#) are needed to complete your client's disability claim. Please note, this is a comprehensive list and not all forms listed are needed for a disability claim.

[Disability Evaluations](#) contain the medical listings of impairments for adults and children, and the criteria for meeting or equaling the listings. These medical listings are commonly referred to as the Blue Book.

[Program Operations Manual System](#) commonly referred to as POMS, is the primary source of information used by Social Security employees to process claims for Social Security benefits. It is important for you to know how Social Security employees process a disability claim and the eligibility requirements that pertain to different situations. There is a lot of information in this manual and it is a good idea to keep this as a bookmark on your internet browser.

[Emergency Messages](#) are sent out from the Social Security Administration when there are changes or updates to policies and procedures. You can subscribe to have these messages directly emailed to you.

Resources for Social Security advocates

If you are looking for additional trainings or would like to become a member of a disability organization, here are a few organizations that may interest you. DHS cannot endorse any of these organizations.

[National Association of Disability Representatives](#) (NADR)

[National Organization of Social Security Claimants' Representatives](#) (NOSSCR)

[Minnesota State Bar Association](#) (MSBA)

[Minnesota Legal Services Coalition](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)

Resources for advocates and their clients



[Arc Minnesota](#) provides information and assistance to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families statewide.

[Disability Hub MN](#) is a statewide resource network that helps people solve problems, navigate the system and plan for their future. Disability Hub MN also has resources, tools, and trainings for support professions and advocates.

[Minnesota Disability Law Center](#) provides assistance with legal issues related to a disability or for help with representative payee issues. You can also call the Minnesota Disability Law Center at 1-800-292-4150 or 612-334-5970.

[Minnesota's Disability Benefits 101 \(DB101\)](#) helps people with disabilities learn how income may impact benefits so they can make informed choices, reduce fears, and ensure work is part of the plan. Minnesotans with disabilities want to work. With DB101, people can explore different ways to balance benefits and work.

[Minnesota's Housing Benefits 101 \(HB101\)](#) is a statewide resource for individuals to find programs that can help pay for housing or get the services they may need.

[Minnesota Able Plan](#) helps disabled individuals save money for qualified disability expenses without losing their eligibility for certain assistance programs, like Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) and Medicaid.

[MNBenefits](#) is an online application for public assistance benefits such as food benefits, cash benefits and housing support.

[Public Benefits: A Bridge for People with Disabilities](#) is a 19-minute video that provides basic information about public assistance benefits in Minnesota and how they support work.

[LinkVet Support](#) is run by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, and offers support seven days a week for Minnesota veterans and their families.
