



Social Security Advocacy Newsletter

May/June 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.

In this issue:

- [Social Security Advocacy team member spotlight](#)
 - [Grantee spotlight](#)
 - [Contract spotlight: Data privacy and incidents](#)
 - [New on-demand training](#)
 - [Closing a case in Social Security Advocacy Services payment system](#)
 - [Reporting SOAR outcomes](#)
 - [Internet assistance for SSI recipients](#)
 - [Social Security updates](#)
 - [Social Security Advocacy Services Team trainings](#)
 - [Minnesota conferences and events](#)
 - [Social Security Administration important websites](#)
 - [Resources for Social Security advocates](#)
 - [Resources for advocates and their clients](#)
-

Social Security Advocacy team member spotlight

We would like to introduce you to, Vang Her, our Social Security Advocacy Coordinator team member.

Vang joined the team in Oct. 2021 bringing with her over 12 years of experience in analyzing applications for disability benefits. She started as a Disability Examiner at the Disability Determinations Services (DDS) then transitioned to the State Medical Review Team (SMRT) as a Disability Analyst. Vang believes that it is an honor and a privilege to be able to make a difference for clients during one of the most critical stage of their lives.



In her free time, Vang enjoys spending time with her family, watching and recording her children play volleyball, simple video editing, and sewing.

You can contact Vang at vang.her@state.mn.us or by calling 651-323-7685

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 Benefit Solutions

Contact information: 952-236-7348 or 612-961-2491; info@disabilitybenefitsolutions.com

Website: www.disabilitybenefitsolutions.com

Service provided:

Disability Benefit Solutions is a disability advocacy practice that provides statewide services guiding clients through all levels of the disability claim process. They gather evidence, analyze facts, and present compelling arguments for why their clients are entitled to benefits. If a denial occurs, they file timely appeals and represent clients before the Social Security Administrative Law Judges. Even if the judges issue unfavorable decisions, their team will look for any errors or abuse of power and often request the Appeals Council to review the Administrative Law Judges' decisions.

At Disability Benefit Solutions, they put people first. They listen and want to learn more about their clients' stories and how their disabilities have affected their quality of life. They understand that clients may have various disabilities and work with clients in the fashion necessary to provide the best and

most comprehensive services available. They help clients understand all the options available under the Social Security Administration disability laws at every stage of the process.

Disability Benefit Solutions takes pride in their ability to effectively serve diverse populations. One characteristic that strengthens Disability Benefit Solutions is the diversity of its staff and the languages they speak that include, English, Somali, Arabic, Oromo, and Amharic. They understand how culture, race, religion, education, and language affect the process and availability of services. Their policies and service delivery procedures are mirrored after the needs of the people they serve to help bridge the gap of inequity and disparities. This helps them serve and support individuals from unrepresented communities as a liaison to the Social Security Administration.

Contract spotlight: Data privacy and incidents

All Social Security Advocacy Services contracted grantees must comply with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and all other applicable safeguards to all data created, collected, received, stored, used, maintained, or disseminated by grantee under their contract with DHS.



This means all client information emailed to DHS staff must be secured or encrypted or you are in violation of your contract with DHS. Documents and client information uploaded directly into the SSAS payment system are automatically protected.

Grantees must, in writing, immediately report to DHS staff all actual or suspected unauthorized uses, privacy incidents, security incidents, and/or breaches such as disclosure(s) of Social Security Administration (SSA) data, Protected Health Information (PHI), or Federal Tax Information (FTI). Also, grantees must follow all reporting requirements outlined within their DHS contract in Attachment A – Data Sharing and Business Associate Agreement Terms and Conditions.

New on-demand training



As a more efficient way to provide technical assistance to our grantees, we have started to create on-demand trainings. Each on-demand training will be on one specific topic and it will include a handout and a recording for you to view at your leisure.

We are pleased to announce that the first on-demand training is on the Appointment of Representative SSA-1696 form. This [recorded training](#) and [handout](#) will show you how to correctly complete the SSA-1696 form based on your contract with

DHS, and when and how to submit the form to the Social Security Administration, and to the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

If you have any suggestions or ideas about the on-demanding training topics or delivery method, please contact your assigned coordinator.

Closing a case in Social Security Advocacy Services payment system

All users of the Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) payment system have the ability to close a client's case for a variety of different reasons. This [tip sheet](#) provides instructions on how to close out a case in the SSAS payment system.

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

Reporting SOAR outcomes

As of Jan. 1, 2022, the Minnesota Department of Human Services is no longer reporting Minnesota SOAR cases on your behalf to the SOAR Works program.

If you are using the SOAR model, you must report the outcome of your cases to SOAR Works through the [Online Application Tracking](#) (OAT) system.

If you have any questions about this reporting responsibility, please contact Minnesota's state team lead, Dan Coladonato at dcoladonato@prainc.com or call 518-439-7415 x5241 or local leads, Joan Madsen-Kirchner at joank@lakesandpines.org or Kim Wirtanen at kimwi@kootasca.org.



Internet assistance for SSI recipients

The [Affordable Connectivity Program](#) (ACP) is a federal benefit program that provides a discount of up to \$30 per month toward internet services for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands.

Any household with an individual who receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is eligible to receive this service. Social Security does not count ACP assistance as income or as a resource for

SSI purposes. A household is also eligible for this service if they receive certain other federal or state benefits or if the household income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Social Security updates



Social Security requests help in identifying homeless cases

The Social Security Administration is noticing a decrease in the number of claims being flagged as homeless. A claimant is homeless if they do not have a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Social Security will also consider claimants homeless if they expect to lose current accommodations within 14 days, and will not have a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. For further information review [Identifying and Flagging Homeless Cases](#), POMS DI 11005.004.

Social Security asks that advocates help them properly flag these cases. When a case is flagged as homeless, that case will be given priority over non-flagged cases, and may receive some special accommodations.

If your client meets the Social Security Administration's definition of homeless, you need to report this homeless status in the remarks section of an initial application, appeal or continuing disability review form. DHS recommends that our contracted grantees use the following sentence in the remark section: "The claimant meets SSA's definition of homeless according to POMS DDI 11005.004". Additionally, DHS recommends you also add how the claimant meets this definition.

Closures or delays affecting in-person service

Some Social Security offices may periodically be closed to the public or may be providing limited services for various reasons. You can view the office changes online at the Social Security Administration's [Office Closings and Emergencies](#) page. You also have the option to subscribe to these updates directly via email or text.

Field office phone numbers

Some of the Minnesota Social Security Administration field office phone numbers have been changed on the [SSA office locator](#) and now have the national number listed in place of their direct phone number. Social Security does have another online site titled [Social Security Administration Data for Field Offices](#), where you can download a spreadsheet that lists the direct phone numbers for all field offices.

Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act

On May 21, 2022, the President signed H.R. 7691, the [Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022](#), which became [Public Law 117-128](#). This law provides Supplemental

Security Income (SSI) eligibility to certain Ukrainian citizens and nationals who are now in the United States.

Social Security Advocacy Services 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 Services team offers trainings and opportunities for Q&A to our contracted Social Security Advocates.

Our next technical assistance training will be **Thursday, July 21, 2022**. Thomas A. Krause, attorney at law with Southern Minnesota

Regional Legal Services will be presenting on *Returning to Work Before an Award of Benefits: Don't Give Up Yet!* Watch your email for registration information.



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 Services Technical Assistance \(TA\) session May 2022](#): *Spotting Winning Cases: Tips for Interviewing Clients, Training Staff, and Referral Sources*, presented by Asha Sharma and Paul McGrath from Disability Partners. 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.

Social Security Advocacy Services payment system tip sheets: [updating your password](#), [invoice and data reports](#), and [status codes](#).

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](#)

[SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery](#) (SOAR)

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.
