

Social Security Advocacy Services Newsletter

September/October 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 Services team member spotlight

We would like to introduce you to our newest team member, Timothy (Tim) Pilcher.

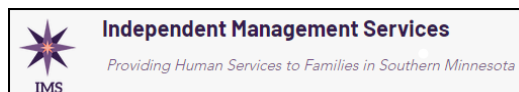
Tim is our new contracts coordinator and will be handling contract-related tasks for the Social Security Advocacy Services team. Tim joined DHS in August of 2022, after many years of experience working with health and human services grants for the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Wisconsin Department of Health. Tim started his work as a case manager for individuals living with HIV in the 1990s, and much of his work since then has focused on supporting grantee agencies serving populations disproportionately impacted by HIV, substance abuse, and other health disparities.



During his free time, Tim enjoys spending time with the three family dogs, signing karaoke and wasting too much time playing games on his personal computer.

Grantee spotlight

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



Agency Name: Independent Management Services

Contact information: 507-437-6389; info@imsofmn.com

Website: www.imsofmn.com

Service provided: Independent Management Services is located in Austin, MN and has been providing and coordinating human service programs to families in southern Minnesota since 1995. When they first started, Independent Management Services originally focused on guardian/conservator services for individuals with cognitive disabilities. Over the last 15 years, they have slowly grown and added the following services: Social Security disability initial applications and reconsideration appeals, adult rehabilitative mental health services, adult mental health case management, children's therapeutic supports and services, certified family peer specialists, in-home services, adult foster care, intensive outpatient chemical health services and assessments, guardian/conservatorship, housing stabilization services, outpatient psychotherapy, psychiatric medication management, dialectical behavioral therapy, and other mental health therapies.

Contract spotlight: Refer individuals to apply for DHS public assistance benefits

The General Duties section, found in most contracts under 2.4.1C, states a grantee will assist an individual in applying for all eligible Minnesota Department of Human Services public assistance benefits such as cash, food, and health care while they help an individual apply for Social Security disability benefits or complete a Continuing Disability Review and wait for a decision from the Social Security Administration.



As an advocate, you can assist an individual to apply for these state benefits by simply referring them to the [MNbenefits](#) online application system. This is where an individual can apply for food assistance, cash programs, emergency assistance, housing support, and child care assistance. The online tool is available in English and Spanish. Another option is to refer an individual to the [Disability Hub MN](#) website. The Hub has many resources and offers an individual assistance by way of chat, email, and telephone. For individuals who do not have access to the internet have them call the Hub at 1-866-333-2466 and a customer service representative will be able to assist them.

It is very important that you are aware of all the services and deliverables within your agency's contract with the Department of Human Services. **Note:** If you do not have a copy of your agency's current contract, please contact your assigned coordinator for a copy.

New Social Security Advocacy Services' training

On Tuesday, Oct. 25 from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Asha Sharma, Paul McGrath, and Leslie Scofield from Disability Partners will be presenting on *Basics of Filing a Social Security Disability Application*. They will walk you through the process of filing an online disability application with tips on how to complete applications efficiently and smoothly. To register for this training, [click here](#).

This will be a great training for those who are just starting out filing disability applications or for those who would like a refresher course.

This training will not be recorded.

Closing cases in the SSAS payment system

All registered users of the Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) Payment System have the ability to close a client's case as long as an invoice has not been submitted to DHS for payment.

Cases must be closed out in the system when an advocate has determined they will no longer be working with a client. When closing out a case, the system will require you to select a reason for closing. In certain situations there may be more than one reason why the case is being closed. Be sure to select the option that best fits the situation.

We ask that you close out a case as soon as you are able to. Follow this step-by-step [tip sheet](#) on how to close out a case.

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

DHS is hiring!



The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has created a brand new position that will coordinate and provide Social Security advocacy services and referrals for Minnesotans who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing, and who communicate primarily in American Sign Language.

This position will provide individual and technical assistance; consults and partners with county and state agencies and other programs serving people who are deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing.

The goal is to increase the number of Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans to successfully apply for and/or maintain federal Social Security disability benefits AND resolve Social Security benefit overpayments.

For more information about this exciting new position and to apply, click [here](#).

Social Security Administration updates



Social Security number and card online service

On this [webpage](#) an individual can apply for a Social Security number and card, request a replacement card, or update their information. Depending on the type of request, an individual can complete the full application online or start the application and bring in any required documents to the local Social Security Administration office to complete the application. After the application is complete, Social Security will mail an individual their new card typically within two weeks. Social Security does not issue a card at their offices or at the card center offices.

Updated COVID-19 protocols for in-person hearings

Effective Oct. 3, the Social Security Administration is no longer requiring individuals to use the COVID-19 check-in tool for in-person hearings. Hearing participants and visitors must still adhere to the following protocols:

- Follow [COVID-19 self-screening requirements](#).
- Wear a face mask, including during hearings.
- Maintain a distance of six feet from SSA employees.
- Consider physical distancing and avoid crowding if COVID-19 community levels are medium or high.

New Office of Native American Partnerships

On Oct. 4, the Social Security Administration announced they have established an Office of Native American Partnerships within the Office of the Commissioner. This new office will be responsible for many functions to assist Tribal communities throughout the country. For further information, read the [full press release](#) and visit the [American Indians and Alaska Natives Social Security webpage](#).

Social Security benefits increase in 2023

On Oct. 13, the Social Security Administration announced Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments will increase 8.7% in 2023. For further information, read the [full press release](#) and the cost-of-living adjustment [fact sheet](#).

Upcoming survey

The Social Security Advocacy Services team will be sending all contracted grantees an electronic survey link in the next month to complete regarding our recent Request for Proposal (RFP) process, contract and insurance negotiations, onboarding, training topics, and using the SSAS payment system.

We are very interested in getting your feedback so that we can make changes to our programs, services, and processes to better serve you and your clients.



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, Nov 17, 2022**. Brian Rudolph from the Social Security Administration along with Sara Dicks and Tanya Heitzinger from the Disability Determination Services will be presenting on the *Social Security Disability Process*. 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.](#)
- [Status codes.](#)
- [Closing a case.](#)

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.

[Saint Louis County Health & Human Services Conference](#) 41st Annual Training Conference & Expo, October 2023.

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

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

[Minnesota Social Service Association](#) (MSSA) 130th Annual Training Conference & Expo, March 15-17, 2023.

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.
