



## Social Security Advocacy Services Newsletter

September/October 2023

Social Security Advocacy Services (SSAS) 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 our newest team member, Nou Vang.

Nou joined DHS in August 2023 as the SSAS contract manager, and she is excited to work with her new team and the various programs in Housing and Support Services area.

Nou graduated with an undergraduate and postgraduate degree from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in Child Psychology and Education. Nou comes to DHS from Hennepin County with over 18 years in various capacities working in maternal child



health and contract management supporting programs in long-term homeless supportive services, housing, and disability services.

In her free time, Nou enjoys the outdoors, hiking, walking, and gardening. Additionally, she enjoys volunteering in the community with her church and is a dedicated board member of Empowering Hmong Women, Inc. Nou is a wife, and a mother of three children, ages 26, 21, and 14.

You can contact Nou at [Nou.Vang@state.mn.us](mailto:Nou.Vang@state.mn.us) or by calling 651-431-5756.

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## 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:** Accord

**Contact information:** 612-362-4400

**Website:** [accord.org](http://accord.org)

**Service provided:**

Accord works with people living with disabilities and mental health issues to achieve their personal and career goals and live life to the fullest. Accord's staff work closely with people with disabilities and seniors to ensure they have access to the housing they deserve. Their team listens to their client's needs, learns from their experiences, and tailors support accordingly. This person-centered approach makes a world of difference, ensuring their client's voices are heard and their concerns are addressed.

Accord provides Social Security Advocacy Services at the initial, reconsideration, and continuing disability review levels. They also provide case management, day support services, community support services, employment services, family support services, life sharing services, housing stabilization services, and supportive housing.

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## Contract spotlight: Serve as the authorized representative

Section 2.4.1.B of your contract with DHS is about serving as an authorized representative and waiving fees. DHS is deferring to the Social Security Administrations rules of conduct and standards of responsibility for representatives as defined in [20 CFR 416.1540](#) and [20 CFR 404.1740](#). DHS expects all grantees to follow these rules and standards when helping a person apply for SSI or RSDI benefits. If you or your agency cannot follow these rules and standards, please contact your assigned coordinator as soon as possible to terminate your contract.



Additionally, when completing an [SSA-1696](#) form, grantees must select only the following SSA fee arrangement in section 7, "I waive the right to receive a fee from the claimant, any auxiliary beneficiaries or any other individual." Grantees must submit an individual's completed SSA-1696 to the appropriate SSA field office after they help an individual submit an application/claim to SSA or upon become an individual's authorized representative. Grantees will not receive payment when an individual is awarded SSA disability benefits if they use a different fee arrangement or have a separate fee arrangement with an individual and SSA. For more information on how to complete an SSA-1696 form based on your contract with DHS, watch this [video](#).

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.

## Updates from Disability Determination Services (DDS)



### Telehealth consultative exams

Following the end of COVID-19 public health emergency declaration in May 2023, SSA published new policy that allows for the continued use of video health technology to conduct mental status exams without testing (MSE) and certain speech/language consultative exams. If a consultative exam (CE) is determined to be needed on a claim, the DDS examiner will first offer telehealth, if a claimant consents to the requirements. DDS uses an application called [Doxy.me](https://www.doxy.me) which requires a device with camera and a microphone, and access to either Chrome, Firefox, or Safari web browsers. The claimant also needs to be physically residing in Minnesota at the time the exam occurs.

Telehealth exams allow DDS to expand access to more difficult to schedule areas so it can help with scheduling exams more quickly and reduce failure rates. If a claimant does not have access to the devices needed, or does not wish to use telehealth, DDS will schedule an in-person exam. DDS will always make phone call attempts first to the claimant for the CE, but if they cannot get a hold of the claimant, they can mail out a telehealth agreement letter.

### Homeless flag indicator

DDS asks that advocates working with people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness add this information onto the remarks section of the online disability application. Make sure when adding the remark to provide specific information on the person's situation. If the Social Security Administration (SSA) field office does not flag a homeless case, then DDS can add the flag on at any point during the claim process. DDS examiners are trained to be on the lookout for this and add the flag on day one of assignment. For further information about identifying and flagging homeless cases read [POMS DI 11005.004](#).

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# SSAS invoice approval summary

## August 2023

A total of 69 invoices submitted by 14 grantees were approved.

Initial application/reconsiderations	54
ALJ hearing level	12
Appeals Council level	1
Continuing Disability Review (CDR)	1
CDR at ALJ hearing level	1

## September 2023

A total of 63 invoices submitted by 18 grantees were approved.

Initial application/reconsiderations	56
ALJ hearing level	6
Continuing Disability Review (CDR)	1

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## SSAS Numbers are in....

In state fiscal year (SFY) 2023, which runs from 7/1/2022 through 6/30/2023, 56 contracted SSAS grantees helped:

- 2,426 people apply for SSA disability benefits.
- 17 veterans get approved for RSDI.
- 983 people get approved for SSA disability benefits.

For further details on the 983 people approved for SSA disability benefits by you and your fellow advocates, see this [document](#).

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## Trainings available on homelessness and more

Did you know that the Minnesota Engagement on Shelter & Housing (MESH) organization provides trainings on homelessness, trauma informed care, harm reduction, motivational interviewing, etc.? Trainings are available through zoom or in person and CEU's are offered. Check out upcoming trainings online at [MN Homelessness Training Hub](#).



## Electronic submission of SSA-1696 form

Are you experiencing issues with a Social Security Administration (SSA) field office not accepting an electronic or faxed SSA-1696 form? Per [POMS GN 03910.040A3](#), SSA has no authority to refuse acceptance of a properly completed SSA-1696 form submitted electronically. If you encounter this situation, you will need to remind the SSA staff person of the above POMS reference. Additionally, SSA is still accepting SSA-1696 forms that have electronic signatures. See [EM-20022 REV 3](#) for further clarification and instructions for electronic signatures. If you have any questions or need further assistance with this issue, contact your assigned DHS SSAS coordinator.



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## 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 16, 2023**. Russell Squire and Christopher D'Silva, attorneys from Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) will be presenting on *Deeming for SSI*. Here is the [link](#) to register for the November TA session.

We previously announced that the November TA session presenter would be retired Administrative Law Judge David Hatfield presenting on *Reopening and Res Judicata*. Mr. Hatfield had to reschedule his presentation. He will now be presenting on Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024. Here is the [link](#) to register for the January TA session.

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](mailto:antonio.reynero@state.mn.us)

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## Social Security Administration updates



### Social Security benefits increase in 2024

The Social Security Administration announced Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments will increase 3.2% in 2024. For further information, read the [full press release](#) and the cost-of-living adjustment [fact sheet](#).



### **Clarification on faxed applications**

In this [dear colleague letter](#), dated 9/19/2023, the Social Security Administration provides some updates and clarification regarding faxed applications no longer being accepted.

### **New mailing address for the Appeals Council**

As of 9/30/2023, the Appeals Council has a new mailing address. In this [dear colleague letter](#), the Social Security Administration provides the new address and reminds every one of the [AC iAppeal](#) option.

### **Program Operations Manual (POMS) updates**

Recently the Social Security Administration updated POMS regarding an individual's ability to perform other work, see [DI 25015 TN 16](#), [DI 25015 TN 17](#), [DI 25015 TN 18](#).

### **Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts**

A representative payee may now establish and maintain an ABLE account to manage a beneficiary's Social Security benefits. For further information, read [POMS recent change notice](#).

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## **Social Security Advocacy Services resources**

Additional resources can be found at the Minnesota Department of Human Services webpage [Social Security Advocacy Services: Policies and procedures for contracted grantees](#).

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