

What's the difference between SSDI and SSI and which is right for you?

If you have become disabled and need to file for disability, the application process can be overwhelming. However, there are ways to get through it. Your first step is to identify the most important questions that need to be answered before you apply:

- Which program will I be eligible for?
- What programs are available to me?
- What are the differences between the programs?
- Which program is better?
- Which program should I apply for?

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Eligibility

To receive Social Security Disability Insurance, you and your employer must have paid into the program through The Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), which is a payroll tax. SSDI recipients will become eligible for the Medicare program (even if they are younger than 65)

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Eligibility

Looks to the disabled person's resources and assets to determine eligibility. Income, resources, or assets that exceed Social Security's set limits will preclude eligibility for the SSI program. SSI recipients will be eligible for Medicaid.

What is written above is the short answer. I've often heard SSDI referred to as a program that requires a work history and SSI referred to as a needs-based program. This answer, though somewhat accurate, is technically incomplete and vague. View SSDI as a conventional insurance policy; once you stop paying premiums, your insurance coverage will eventually lapse.

Generally speaking, your SSDI coverage will expire approximately five years after you stop working. This date is referred to as your Date Last Insured (DLI). In order to receive SSDI benefits, you must be found disabled by Social Security on or prior to your DLI. If you want to know more about your personal eligibility for SSDI, as well as other Social Security programs, go [here](#) and create your own personal account.

As previously stated, SSI does not require FICA contributions. An individual's eligibility is determined based on income, resources, or assets available to that individual and these resources can preclude eligibility for the SSI program. In some cases, eligibility might only be reduced. For example, if a person is awarded SSI benefits and they receive food and shelter at no cost to them, the dollar amount of monthly SSI benefits could be reduced by a certain amount. SSI eligibility is determined at a Pre-Effectuation Review Conference (PERC appointment). Once a person is found medically eligible for SSI benefits, Social Security will schedule a PERC appointment to determine final eligibility as well as eligible amounts.

So, which program should you apply for if you decide you need to apply for disability? Should you apply for both programs? Which one is better to apply for?

It's not a question of better for most; you should apply for the program whose eligibility requirements you meet. If you are eligible for SSDI, but you have a short work history, low earnings, part-time earnings, or sporadic earnings, then you may want to apply for both SSDI and SSI to supplement a potentially low SSDI monthly payment. If your SSDI monthly amount would make you ineligible for SSI, then you would likely apply only for SSDI. Even some young adults that lack a work history could be eligible for SSDI benefits if found disabled prior to age 22 and they meet certain additional requirements. There is no single answer to address all possible circumstances.

Because every person's situation is different, I have only given a very general treatment to the topics of SSDI and SSI. If you still have questions (and you should!) and to determine what program(s) you should apply for, it's advisable you consult with the Social Security Administration or, of course, an attorney to address your particular circumstances.