



Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project presents **Reentry and Public Benefits in Pennsylvania**

If you are going to be released soon, here is some information on public benefits. Public benefits can help you with your basic needs when you are living in the community.

DISABILITY BENEFITS

If you are disabled, you may qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Benefits. These are disability benefits provided from the Social Security Administration.

SSI is for people who are age 65 or older, blind, or disabled. Your income and assets must be below a certain limit.

SSDI is for people who have enough work history and who have a disability.

What is a disability? You are considered “disabled” for disability benefits if you have a physical or mental impairment (including an emotional or learning problem) which:

- results in the inability to do any “substantial gainful activity;” and
- has lasted or will last for a continuous period of at least 12 months, or it can be expected to result in death.

Can you receive SSI/SSDI payments if...

You are incarcerated because you were convicted of a crime, and serving a sentence of over 30 days in a row?	No. Your benefits are suspended first, and then after 1 year, they will be terminated.
You are incarcerated while awaiting trial?	No. But if you are found not guilty or the charges are dismissed, then you may receive the payments after.
You are at a halfway house?	Generally no.
You are on parole or probation?	Yes
You are on home confinement or home detention?	Yes

SOCIAL SECURITY (RETIREMENT) BENEFITS

If you are eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, which means you are 62 years or older and have paid Social Security taxes for at least 10 years, your benefits will not be able to be paid to you while you are incarcerated, but they can go to your spouse or children.

GETTING SSI/SSDI OR RETIREMENT BENEFITS AFTER RELEASE:

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has a pre-release agreement with the local Social Security offices and should automatically notify those offices when a person who qualifies for Social Security benefits is released.

Should you apply while you are still incarcerated? Yes. You should submit an application for SSI/SSDI benefits while you are still incarcerated and before you are released if you have a release date. Approval takes a few months, and submitting this application before your release gives the Social Security Administration time to process the application and start benefit payments upon release.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE: MEDICAID AND MEDICARE

Medicaid is health insurance that is administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. There are many different categories of medical assistance. How you qualify and the income limits will depend on the category of medical assistance. How much medical assistance pays will depend on the category of medical assistance that you are in.

Medicaid is an assistance program for low-income patients' medical expenses.

Medicare is a medical insurance program for people over 65, younger disabled people, and dialysis patients.

Can you get Medicaid if...

You are incarcerated?	No
You were arrested but are released on bail?	Yes
You are on probation, parole, house arrest, or home confinement?	Yes

If you are on medical assistance and become incarcerated, your medical assistance does not just terminate. Instead, the medical assistance gets suspended for a period of not more than 2 years. If you are released within 2 years, the suspension of medical assistance is over and you will continue to receive medical assistance.

OBTAINING MEDICAID COVERAGE:

While you are incarcerated, you can apply for Medicaid, but you cannot enroll until you are released. It usually takes about 30 days to receive a decision.

How to apply for Medicaid:

1. On Paper: Complete the application and mail it to your County Assistance office. The application is available at: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Documents/Benefits%20Applications/PA-600-2-20-Final.pdf>
2. Phone: Call the Consumer Service Center for Health Care Coverage at 1-866-550-4355
3. Online: You can apply at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/compass.web/Public/CMPHome>
4. In-Person: Directly through your County Assistance Office.

FOOD STAMPS AND CASH ASSISTANCE

Food Stamps are provided through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). You are not eligible for SNAP while incarcerated, but you may be eligible upon release. SNAP benefits provide a way for you to purchase food at grocery stores if you are low-income.

If you are approved, you will receive an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Access card that you would use to buy food. It acts like a debit card.

Cash Assistance is provided through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. You are not eligible for TANF while incarcerated, but you may be eligible upon release.

TANF eligibility is much more restrictive than SNAP. TANF is only available to pregnant women, and families with dependent children. TANF is only available if you have a total amount of resources under \$1,000. You can only receive TANF for 5 years as an adult.

How to apply for Food Stamps or Cash Assistance:

1. On Paper: Complete the application and return it to your County Assistance office. The application is available at: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Documents/Benefits%20Applications/PA-600-2-20-Final.pdf>
2. Online: You can apply at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/compass.web/Public/CMPHome>
3. In-Person: Directly through your County Assistance Office.