

## **Benefits Advisement Services For ACCES-VR Consumers**

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*Vocational rehabilitation organizations pay for services to augment the other benefits advisement services that Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS) provides. New York State Adult Career and Continuing Educational Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) funding of benefits advisement services is a key part of the benefits advisement continuum and directly supports the beneficiary's move to a work goal.*

### **What are Benefits Advisement Services?**

Benefits advisement services are provided to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or SSI beneficiaries if they are working or planning to go to work. We assist in helping persons identify and apply for any supports they may be entitled to, but not yet receiving. Our benefits advisers assist beneficiaries in understanding Social Security Administration (SSA) rules and navigating SSA's intricate system. Our knowledgeable benefits advisers help to simplify the complicated set of rules that govern how work affects multiple benefits programs.

### **What Can a Benefits Adviser Provide to a Beneficiary?**

- ◆ Information about how work affects SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, etc.
- ◆ Help to establish eligibility and apply for disability benefits and other supports
- ◆ Make referrals to other supports available to persons with disabilities
- ◆ Written confirmation of information provided in a readable format

### **How can Benefits Advisement Services, through ACCES-VR, Best Compliment Similar Benefits Advisement Services?**

- ◆ ACCES-VR can voucher for benefits advisement services to NLS (basic services generally up to 10 hours, sometimes more if authorized for special circumstances).
- ◆ An ACCES-VR referral is very appropriate for an SSDI or SSI beneficiary when their case is not a priority for our SSA-funded Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program (e.g., if not yet working or looking for work).
- ◆ A benefits adviser can provide good and detailed information on multiple benefits issues.
- ◆ Provide interventions or legal advocacy services for issues that pose a barrier to employment.

### **Examples of Key Help for Beneficiaries through Benefits Advisement:**

- ◆ Obtain and/or retain Medicaid health insurance while working – through 1619(b) Medicaid or the Medicaid Buy-in for Working People with Disabilities.
- ◆ Explain work incentives specific to individuals who receive SSI, SSDI, or a combination of both.
- ◆ Use work incentives, in some cases, to keep SSI or SSDI benefits as work activity increases.
- ◆ Use of SSI's Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS) to compliment ACCES-VR funding for vocationally related items such as tuition, a vehicle, or a computer.

- ◆ Determine eligibility for other government benefits, such as special food stamp eligibility.
- ◆ Avoid and/or reduce rental subsidy decreases while first working.
- ◆ Avoid overpayment(s) of disability benefits.
- ◆ Make referral for information and advice regarding student loans.
- ◆ For those eligible, increase the amount of SSI and establish eligibility for a special food stamp program through a “Roomer / Lodger” agreement
- ◆ To ensure that SSDI beneficiaries’ eligible family members receive applicable benefits.

### **ACCES-VR Referrals to Assist with the SSI/SSDI Application:**

- ◆ The benefits adviser can explain the application process, identify key medical documentation to gather, and reinforce the need to list all treatment sources in the application materials. This is not a service provided under the WIPA project.
- ◆ As appropriate, we will assist the individual in completing application documents.
- ◆ Advise on appeals process and make applicable referral for assistance.

### **Benefits Advisement Often Leads to Better Work Outcomes. For SSI or SSDI Beneficiaries, it can Result in Full Reimbursement to ACCES-VR of the Cost of Rehabilitation.**

- ◆ Often the fear of quickly losing cash benefits and Medicaid/Medicare coverage leads individuals to limit their work activity or not work at all.
- ◆ In our experience, after a full explanation of the SSA work rules and work incentives, the beneficiary is then confident to take the next step toward a work goal.
- ◆ Similarly, a full explanation of how to retain Medicaid through either 1619(b) or the Medicaid Buy-In for Working People with Disabilities can provide a level of confidence that leads to a higher level of work.
- ◆ Under Social Security’s “Cost Reimbursement Program,” if the individual works at the substantial gainful activity level (\$1,550 gross monthly for disabilities other than blindness in 2024) for 9 consecutive months, Social Security will fully reimburse all of ACCES-VR’s expenses in supporting the SSI or SSDI beneficiary’s rehabilitation effort.

### **Process for Benefits Advisement Referrals through ACCES-VR:**

ACCES-VR consumers can request benefits advisement services through their ACCES-VR counselors. Frequently, ACCES-VR counselors will automatically make a referral to NLS. He or she will send a completed voucher (VR Authorization for Planned Services) and a cover letter indicating contact information for the consumer and the reason for referral to NLS for all counties of the Western New York Region including the Rochester NY region.

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