

TIPS When Applying For Social Security Disability Benefits

Before applying to the **Social Security Administration (SSA)** for social security disability benefits you should review the **disAbility Law Center of Virginia's** publication entitled: **Considering Applying for a Social Security Disability Benefit?** This will help you determine if you are a good candidate for these benefits. It will also help you decide whether to apply for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and what to expect with the process.

Ways to apply for SSDI and/or SSI

For Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI):

- To **apply online** go to the following Social Security Administration link:
<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityssi/apply.html> . The process is secure and user-friendly and will guide you every step of the way. You will be given a PIN number to re-enter as often as it takes to complete the application. Or, you may:
- Schedule an appointment with a local Social Security office by calling Social Security Administration's national toll free number **1-800-772-1213** (TTY **1-800-325-0778**) from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday or go to your local social security office. If this line is busy they will give you the option to leave a message and your call will be returned usually within one hour. Be sure to ask for the application forms to complete prior to your appointment. You may also request a telephone appointment to complete your application so you don't have to leave your home. If you choose an in-office appointment you should not have to wait.

For Supplemental Security Income (SSI):

Social Security does not offer the online application for SSI applicants. To apply, use the phone number above to make an in-person or telephone appointment with your local SSA office. You will be sent the Disability Benefit Application and the Adult Disability Report. Complete these before the appointment. If you are unable to fill it out yourself you will receive help at the appointment. The TIPS below will help you learn how to complete the application.

If you have internet access you may go to the same webpage listed above to learn about the disability program and the information you must gather to apply. In general, you will be expected to supply information about your medical conditions, where and when you have received treatment, and your work history over the last 15 years. You are not required to collect your records for your claim.

Make copies and then take your application forms to a social security office and be sure they provide you evidence of receipt. Or, mail the forms using a certified return receipt.

Tips When Applying for SSDI and/or SSI

- If you currently have limited assets and resources you should apply for BOTH SSDI and SSI. Even if your SSDI benefit would be over the current SSI benefit rate you may qualify for SSI to cover the 5-month waiting period for SSDI.
- Provide complete answers to ALL questions.
- Include ALL doctors (including psychiatrists) and hospitals used to treat your disabilities to include the addresses, dates of service and diagnostics, and reason for visit or hospitalization. Other treating sources should also be included such as mental health therapists, physical therapists, and chiropractors.
- Include a complete list of ALL medications with the correct dosage and reason for taking. Be sure to state side effects of each medication.
- Include a complete job history providing all information requested and include the reason for leaving the job especially if it is disability related. If you have not worked recently or had interruptions in work, explain why.
- Under the Vocational Section include the name of any vocational agency you have worked with.
- Use the Remarks Section to add any other information about your inability to perform daily activities and perform **any** work. Describe your symptoms and limitations as they exist on your worst day, not your best day.
- When you receive the Function Report be sure to fill it out completely and provide examples of things you can no longer do or do in a very limited way. This form is due within 10-days of when you received it. Don't delay!
- To check on your case, or add new evidence, call the Examiner at Disability Determination Services (DDS). Their name and number is in the letter they send when they notify you they have received your application. Or, you can find the number to the closest DDS office using this web address: <http://www.vadrs.org/dds.htm>. If you are calling on someone's behalf they must be with you to give DDS permission to discuss their application.

- If SSA schedules a medical appointment for you (at their expense) you must go but you can change to a more convenient time. If you need to cancel or reschedule call the DDS Examiner using the method above.
- Meet ALL deadlines and, if denied, appeal for “**reconsideration**” within the 60 days allowed. To appeal you may return to your online application or call the toll free number 1-800-772-1213. If you miss this deadline for a good reason you have a right to ask for an extension. This is called “good cause for late filing”. Otherwise, you will have to re-apply.

If you are denied a second time, file the appeal called “**Request for Hearing by an Administrative Law Judge**” within 60-days and seek representation as soon as possible.

A hearing will be scheduled but this may take up to a year or more. The judge at the hearing expects you to have representation (an advocate). You may want to review the dLCV publication entitled: “**TIPS When Appealing a Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income Claim**”.

Note: The disAbility Law Center of Virginia (dLCV) provides representation for a small number of cases each year. You may call the office on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday between 9:00am and 4:00pm to discuss this with an advocate on duty. You may also use the list of referrals provided by the Social Security Administration’s Office of Disability Adjudication and Review when you file the appeal. It is important to find someone who specializes in social security disability and who you can meet with in person. You may use the following sources to obtain referrals in your community:

National Organization of Social Security Claimants Representatives
 Lawyer Referral Service
www.nosscr.org 800-431-2804

National Association of Disability Representatives
 Non-Lawyer Referral Service
www.nadr.org 800-747-6131

Virginia Lawyer Referral Service
<http://www.vsb.org/vlrs/index.php/public/vlrs/>
 800-552-7977

disAbility Law Center of Virginia
1512 Willow Lawn Drive, Suite 100, Richmond, VA 23235
(804) 225-2042 (local and TTY) (800) 552-3962 (statewide)
www.dLCV.org or for publications go to: www.dLCV.org/publication/