



SSI for Persons who are Homeless

January 2020

Introduction

Supplemental Security Income or SSI is intended to provide a basic level of cash assistance to persons who are aged, blind or disabled with little income and few resources to help them pay for the necessities of housing and food. Because of this, the SSI program considers an individual's living arrangement when making initial eligibility determinations and when deciding how much the monthly SSI cash payment should be. There are certain rules in the SSI program that only apply to individuals who are transient or homeless and still others that apply to individuals who live in public emergency shelters for homeless persons.

SSI for Persons who are Transient or Homeless

As long as all of the basic eligibility requirements for the SSI program are met, it's possible for someone who is homeless or transient to receive SSI benefits and associated Medicaid coverage. Social Security defines a "transient" as an individual with no permanent living arrangement; in other words, no fixed place of residence. A transient can be a homeless individual (i.e., someone who sleeps in doorways, overnight shelters, parks, bus stations, etc.); or a person who stays with a succession of friends or relatives and has no permanent living arrangement on the first moment of the month. Social Security does not consider someone who is a member of a household or a resident of an "institution" to be transient.

The SSI program counts many forms of income and also in-kind items when determining eligibility for SSI and when calculating the amount of the monthly cash payment. Generally, when an SSI recipient receives help with paying for food and/or shelter or is given food and/or shelter by someone else, it's considered to be a form of income called "in-kind support and maintenance" or ISM. Social Security may exclude some or all of the assistance that a transient or homeless individual receives from income when making ISM determinations. These excluded forms of income include the following:

1. Homeless individuals frequently receive food and/or shelter from needs-based programs offered by charitable nonprofit organizations in the community. These organizations are often certified by the State to be providers of support and

maintenance assistance (SMA). Under certain prescribed circumstances, Social Security may exclude some forms of SMA from income. Some examples of this would be food vouchers provided by a local charitable organization and free meals provided by a local Mission or Soup Kitchen.

2. Although a homeless individual may receive food or shelter that he or she hasn't paid for, that food or shelter may have no value. Examples of ISM of no value include discarded food (such as when a restaurant discards leftover breakfast items after breakfast serving hours end) and shelter that has no market value (such as sleeping in an abandoned building, in a park, or in a vehicle). Receipt of such items would not result in countable ISM.
3. Other excludable assistance includes State or local assistance based on need such as welfare payments funded wholly by the State, medical and social services, and food stamps.

The following example illustrates the policies that apply to determining ISM for transient and homeless individuals.

EXAMPLE: Mr. Jones comes into a Social Security field office on 1/15/20 for a redetermination. He reports that he started living in his automobile on 9/15/19 because he could not afford a permanent place to live. While living in his automobile, he received some of his food from a food bank and bought the rest himself. From 11/16/19 through 11/27/19 he stayed with his brother who didn't charge for food and shelter. He left his brother's home on 11/28/19 and resumed living in his automobile. With the onset of winter weather, a local church opened up a temporary shelter. Mr. Jones began staying at the church's shelter on 12/29/19. The church shelter provides meals and sleeping quarters at no cost to those who stay.

Analysis: Based on the case facts provided during the interview, the Claims Representative (CR) determined that Mr. Jones is a homeless individual and that his Living Arrangement (LA) and ISM should be determined under the rules for transients/homeless as of 10/1/19. The CR determined that living in an automobile did not result in countable ISM. In addition, the food bank is certified as a provider of support and maintenance assistance (SMA), so the food from the food bank is also not countable as ISM.

However, no exclusion applies to the food and shelter provided by Mr. Jones' brother. So the CR must develop the value of the food and shelter Mr. Jones received from 11/16/19 through 11/27/19. Because Mr. Jones is a transient, the first of the month rule doesn't apply to the ISM determination. Any ISM received in a month is countable. When the CR notified Mr. Jones about the PMV rule and rebuttal rights, Mr. Jones provided evidence that the actual value of the food and shelter for November 2019 was

\$130. Since the actual value is less than the PMV, the actual value of \$130 is counted as ISM for this month.

The church that provided overnight shelter is also a certified provider of SMA, so Social Security would not count the food and shelter provided to Mr. Jones by the church shelter as ISM.

SSI for Individuals Residing in a Public Emergency Shelter for the Homeless

Individuals who reside in public institutions are not eligible for SSI benefits. However, there are special SSI rules that apply to homeless individuals who reside in a public emergency shelter for the homeless (PESH) that allow eligibility for SSI benefits. A Public Emergency Shelter for the Homeless (PESH) is defined as a public institution or that part of a public institution used as an emergency shelter by the Federal government, a State, or a political subdivision of a State, primarily for making available on a temporary basis, a place to sleep, food, and some services or treatment to homeless individuals. The following are situations in which the PESH exception does not apply.

1. A medical treatment facility is not a PESH.
2. An individual is not a resident of a PESH if the facility in which he or she resides has control over the individual. Examples of such facilities include:
 - a holding facility, halfway house, detoxification center, or like facilities;
 - foster care facilities which provide temporary care for children/ adults until a permanent foster home can be located;
 - facilities housing individuals awaiting discharge from an institution and placement in the community; and
 - facilities providing transitional living arrangements as part of an institution's plan to facilitate an individual's adjustment to community living.
3. If all of the residents of a facility are there under the control of the penal system, then the institution is penal. However, if the institution also accommodates residents (other than employees) who are not subject to legal process and are free to come and go as they please, that part of the facility may be a public emergency shelter for the homeless (PESH) for these residents.

Individuals living in a public shelter for the homeless may be eligible for up to 6 months of SSI benefits in any 9-month period. The 6 months do not need to be consecutive. Eligibility for the PESH exception stops effective the 7th month throughout which the individual resides in a

shelter in any 9-month period. Below is an example illustrating how Social Security determines when the rolling 9-month period occur and which months SSI payments are due.

EXAMPLE: An SSI recipient enters a public emergency shelter for the homeless on May 15, 2020, and is still there on June 1, 2020. The individual doesn't know when he will be able to secure a permanent housing arrangement. June 2020 is the first full month of residency in a PESH for purposes of determining the 9-month period. The rolling 9-month period is June 2020 back through October 2019. To determine which months are included in the rolling 9-month period, Social Security starts with the first full month and counts backwards for 9 full months. From May 2020 back through October 2019, the individual was not in a public emergency shelter for the homeless.

The individual stays in the shelter until December 5, 2020, when he moves to his own apartment. For each month the individual remains in the PESH, the 9-month period rolls forward a month. For example, in July 2020, the rolling 9-month period is July 2020 back through November 2019. The individual would receive an SSI payment under this provision for the months of June 2020 through November 2019, the 6 months throughout which he was a resident of a public emergency shelter, in addition to a payment for May 2020 and December 2020 (the months of admission and discharge).

If the individual didn't find a place of his own in December of 2020, but remained in the PESH, he would not be eligible for a payment in January 2021 since he would have already received 6 SSI payments within the rolling 9-month period during which he lives in the PESH.

Use the following chart to determine the beginning and ending months of the rolling 9-month period.

If the calendar month under consideration is:	Then use as the first month of the rolling 9-month period:
January	May
February	June
March	July
April	August
May	September
June	October
July	November
August	December
September	January
October	February

If the calendar month under consideration is:	Then use as the first month of the rolling 9-month period:
November	March
December	April

NOTE: If both members of a married couple are eligible for SSI and homeless, Social Security will treat them as eligible individuals. To be an eligible couple, they must live together in a household. Social Security does not consider living together in a homeless shelter or an automobile to be living in a household.

Things to Remember

For SSI recipients who experience homelessness, it's important to remember that residing in a public emergency shelter can affect eligibility for cash payments over time. SSI recipients may need assistance with reporting this important change in living arrangement to the local Social Security office and need to be counseled on how many months of cash payments they may expect. If an SSI recipient stays too long in a PESH, it's possible that SSI benefits will be suspended for some period of time. By the time this information gets to the local Social Security office, the SSI recipient may be overpaid and may owe money back. The SSI policies that apply to recipients residing in public emergency shelters must be carefully considered when agencies are helping individuals who are homeless secure permanent housing.

Conducting Independent Research

[POMS SI 00835.060 -- Transients, Homeless Individuals, and LA/ISM Determinations](https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lnx/0500835060)

(<https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lnx/0500835060>)

[POMS SI 00520.600 -- Residents of Public Emergency Shelters for the Homeless](https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/poms.nsf/lnx/0500520600)

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