

# CHAPTER 21: TICKET TO WORK

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## Chapter 21

# TICKET TO WORK

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## **SECTION 1: Overview**

The “Ticket to Work Program” was created as part of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. Its purpose is to expand the number of service providers available to SSDI and SSI beneficiaries in obtaining services necessary to find, enter and retain employment. The goal of the program is to reduce or eliminate their dependence on Social Security and SSI cash benefits.

Under the Ticket to Work Program, the Social Security Administration pays Employment Networks (employment service providers) outcome and milestone payments if they assist SSI/SSDI beneficiaries become employed above defined income thresholds. DBVI operates as an Employment Network under the Ticket to Work program.

Historically, the Ticket to Work Program is an important source of revenue for DBVI and these funds have helped fund services for DBVI consumers. This is because DBVI has been effective in helping beneficiaries return to work and increase their earnings. DBVI receives payment when a beneficiary achieves the following milestones:

Phase 1 Milestones: Earnings at a Trial Work Level for one, three, six and 9 months.

Phase II Milestones: Each month of earnings at a Substantial Gainful Activity level (for 11 months for SSDI beneficiaries and 18 months for SSI beneficiaries).

Outcomes: Each month the beneficiary receives a zero benefit as a result of work activity (for 36 months for SSDI beneficiaries and 60 months for SSI beneficiaries).

## **SECTION 2: Definitions**

A. “Ticket to Work” is a document provided by the Social Security Administration to disabled and blind SSDI and SSI beneficiaries that they can use to access employment services, vocational rehabilitation services and other support services to enable them to go to work. Services can be obtained from state VR agencies and other qualified Employment Networks.

B. “Maximus” is the organization Social Security has hired to assist in the administration of the Ticket Program.

C. Continuing Disability Review (CDR): SSA reviews disability cases periodically to see if the person with a disability still meets disability criteria. SSA performs two types of reviews, a medical continuing disability review and a work continuing disability review. Under a work review, SSA looks at earnings to determine if an individual is eligible for monthly benefits. A medical review determines if an individual is meeting the medical requirements to collect disability. If the person does not meet the medical requirements, SSA may stop the disability benefits.

D. Employment Network: An Employment Network is an organization or individual who provides employment services under the Ticket to Work program.

### **SECTION 3: GENERAL PROCEDURES**

The following are guidelines for DBVI counselors for the Ticket to Work Program. It is important to note that the Ticket Program is an SSA program that is administered by SSA and their contractors. The payment mechanisms built into the program should not influence the DBVI rehabilitation counseling process. The DBVI consumer’s wishes, goals, skills and aptitudes should drive his/her choices regarding their employment goal and how much they want to work and earn.

#### **1. Ticket Assignment is automatic at the point the IPE is signed.**

- a. When an individual who receives SSI or SSDI signs an IPE, SSA considers that their Ticket to Work is “In Use”. That is to say, by choosing to seek DBVI services and signing an IPE, they have also chosen to activate their Ticket to Work.
- b. *You do not need to take any action.* DBVI is required to inform SSA when

an SSI or SSDI beneficiary signs an IPE. This process is completed electronically through Central Office. **It is very important that you have the correct Social Security Number entered in the DBVI database, or the consumers Ticket will not be assigned to DBVI.** If you do not get the Social Security Number at application, you must try to get it entered prior the IPE date.

- c. SSA's contractor MAXIMUS will send a letter to the DBVI consumer informing them they have assigned their Ticket to DBVI.

## **2. How should I explain the Ticket to Work to my consumer?**

- a. Use the Ticket to Work FAQ for DBVI Consumers (Section 7) to explain the program. Explain to the DBVI consumer that it will not affect his/her DBVI services in any way.
- b. Explain to the DBVI consumer that DBVI can receive payment if they go to work above the thresholds for payment. However, how much they work is entirely their choice. If DBVI does receive payment under the Ticket to Work, any money received goes toward services for other DBVI customers.
- c. Explain to the consumer, that by assigning their Ticket, through participation in the DBVI program, they will receive suspension of SSA Medical reviews for a minimum of one year. This only applies if this is the first time the customer has ever assigned their Ticket.
- d. If appropriate, encourage the consumer to consult with a benefits counselor regarding the potential impact of the employment plan on his/her benefits and healthcare coverage.

## **3. What if the consumer really does not want to have their Ticket assigned to DBVI?**

The beneficiary can contact MAXIMUS and request their Ticket to Work be unassigned. However, as noted in the prior section, when a SSI/SSDI beneficiary signs a DBVI IPE, SSA considers that Ticket "In Use". In these cases, DBVI can still potentially receive payment under the SSA cost reimbursement program.

## **4. What if the consumer has assigned the Ticket to another Employment Network?**

DBVI will report the Ticket as “In Use” with DBVI to SSA. The Ticket to Work will be reassigned to DBVI. DBVI may have to share potential payments with the other Employment Network.

**5. What if a consumer becomes Ticket eligible after they have signed their IPE?**

In is not unusual for a DBVI consumer to start receiving benefits after they have signed an IPE. DBVI will report the Ticket to Work as “In Use” to SSA. The effective date will be at the point the individual became eligible for SSI/SSDI benefits.

**SECTION 4: CDR REVIEWS**

SSA reviews disability cases periodically to see if the person with a disability still meets disability eligibility criteria. SSA performs two types of reviews, a medical continuing disability review and a work continuing disability review. Under a work review, SSA looks at earnings to determine if an individual is eligible for monthly benefits. A medical review determines if an individual is meeting the medical requirements to collect disability. If the person does not meet the medical requirements, SSA may stop the disability benefits.

Under the Ticket to Work program, when a customer assigns his/her Ticket to DBVI (or another Employment Network), SSA will not do a medical CDR for one year following the date of his/her Ticket assignment.

SSA will suspend medical CDR’s for up to five additional years if the beneficiary is considered to be making timely progress. Timely progress is defined as follows:

| <b>Timeline</b>    | <b>Required benchmarks for timely progress to continue suspension of Medical Reviews</b>  |
|--------------------|---|
| By End of Year One | Three months of work at a Trial Work Level (defined by SSA) or 60% of full time participation in a post-secondary education or vocational training program. |
| By End of Year Two | Six months of work at a Trial Work Level (defined by SSA) or 75% of full time participation in a post-secondary education or vocational                     |

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
|                      | training program.   |
| By End of Year Three | Nine months of Work at a Substantial Gainful Activity level (defined by SSA) or completion of a two year degree.                              |
| By End of Year Four  | Nine months of Work at a Substantial Gainful Activity level (defined by SSA) or completion of an additional year of post-secondary education. |
| By End of Year Five  | Six months at zero benefits as a result of employment or completion of an additional year of post-secondary education.                        |
| By End of Year Six   | Six months at zero benefits as a result of employment or completion of a four year degree   |

The timely progress rules and the potential impact of a medical CDR are very complex. It is strongly recommended that the DBVI counselor refer a customer to a benefits counselor if they have concerns about these provisions.

## **SECTION 5: EMPLOYMENT NETWORK PARTNERSHIPS**

DBVI has partnership agreements with all the Vermont Designated Agencies and Specialized Service agencies that provide supported employment services and JOBS program services. As part of this agreement all the Designated Agencies in Vermont have agreed to participate in DBVI/Designated Agency Employment Network Partnership. DBVI and the agencies will operate as a single Employment Network. DBVI will act as the administrative agent for the Ticket program and all Tickets will be assigned to DBVI.

DBVI counselors should follow the procedures in Section 3 regarding Ticket assignment for customers served through supported employment and JOBS programs.

## **SECTION 6: CHANGES IN PROCEDURES**

It is not uncommon for SSA or Maximus to change or add administrative procedures to the Ticket to Work Program. Therefore, DBVI central office will inform DBVI staff of any changes in procedure and will amend policy accordingly.

## **SECTION 7: TICKET TO WORK, FAQ**

### **1. What is the Ticket to Work?**

The Ticket to Work is a Social Security Administration program designed to help SSI and SSDI beneficiaries get services that will help them return to work. You can assign your Ticket to any participating provider (called an Employment Network) in the program. DBVI is an Employment Network.

### **2. Why does DBVI participate in the Ticket to Work?**

If you go to work and earn above a certain level, DBVI will receive outcome payments from the Social Security Administration. DBVI puts those funds back into services for other customers.

### **3. What happens if I am not able to go to work?**

Nothing. There is no consequence if you are not able to go to work after assigning your Ticket.

### **4. Other than employment services, do I get any other benefit by participating in the Ticket to Work program?**

The Social Security Administration will suspend any scheduled medical review for at least one year after you assign your Ticket. They will extend the suspension of medical reviews for additional years (up to six years total) if you meet certain employment, training or educational goals. For more details you should talk to a benefits counselor.

### **5. Do I have to participate in the Ticket to Work program?**

If you sign a DBVI Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), the Social Security Administration considers that you are using your Ticket to Work. DBVI is required to inform the Social Security Administration when a SSI or SSDI beneficiary signs a DBVI IPE.

If you would like more information on the Ticket to Work program you can contact the following independent informational resources:

Social Security Administration: 1-800-772-1213 or TTY 1-800-325-0778 or [www.socialsecurity.gov/work](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work)

MAXIMUS: 1-866-968-7842 or [www.yourtickettowork.com](http://www.yourtickettowork.com)

Vermont Protection and Advocacy Inc: 1-800-834-7890

Vermont Center for Independent Living: 1-800-639-1522

## **6. What happens to my SSI or SSDI benefits if I go to work?**

Going to work may affect your SSI and SSDI benefits as well as other state or federal benefits you receive. It depends on how much you work and what benefits you receive. In most cases you will be financially better off if you are able to work. *However, it is very important you get good information on your specific situation. We strongly recommend you work with a qualified benefits counselor to help you understand how work will affect your benefits.*

In Vermont you can get benefits counseling services from DBVI by contacting your counselor or the Vermont Center for Independent Living at the following number:

Vermont Center for Independent Living: 1-800-639-1522