

Social Security Administration

Response to COVID-19

PRACTICE TIP • March 2020

Kate Lang, Justice in Aging

In response to COVID-19 concerns, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has made significant changes to its operations and policies. As of Tuesday, March 17, local SSA offices are closed to the public indefinitely. SSA is also extending their deadlines for filing wherever possible. The agency is regularly [posting information](#) about how the pandemic is affecting its services.

Some SSA employees in the local offices are continuing to work on SSA's highest priority workloads. These include:

- Requests for "dire need" benefit payments, for individuals who did not receive their regular monthly payment, are currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, or whose benefits previously were suspended and can now be reinstated.
- Disability applications for those with the most severe disabilities.
- Changes of address, changes of direct deposit, changes of representative payee, and reports of death.

How to Reach your Local Office

Local offices continue to provide some services over the phone—you can now find the direct phone number for each [local office by zip code](#). To find your local office number, look below the result for the local office, scroll down past the listing of the hours, and click on the plus sign to "Show Additional Office Information"—the phone number for the local office will be shown here. [Online services](#) also remain available. There are not enough SSA employees currently available to handle the call volume to the national 800 number, so callers will likely experience extremely significant delays or inability to access the line.

Continuing Disability Reviews & Overpayments

SSA is not starting or completing any medical continuing disability reviews (CDRs), and has suspended processing and collecting most new overpayments. Some automated processes will still proceed because there are not enough SSA employees available to take the manual actions necessary to stop them. However, SSA will continue established collection activity for existing overpayments.

Hearings

Currently, all SSA hearing offices are closed to the public. All in-person hearings before an Administrative Law Judge have been cancelled, and claimants and their representatives who are scheduled to have a hearing soon are being contacted to schedule telephone hearings. Postponements are being granted for anyone who declines a telephone hearing. Individuals are not required to do a telephone hearing, but if they decline to go forward with a telephone hearing at this time, it could be some months before an in-person hearing is scheduled for them.

The status of each Disability Determination Service (DDS) varies, as these are state entities that contract with SSA to work on disability cases. The decision on whether or not to close the DDS is made by the governor of that state.

Scam Alert

SSA is not taking any new, manual actions to reduce, suspend, or delay any benefits during this period, although automated actions may continue. If an individual receives a communication threatening to suspend or discontinue benefits because SSA offices are closed, this is [most likely a scam](#), and should be [reported](#) to the Inspector General.

Please check SSA's [website](#) for updated policies.

As the COVID-19 public health situation is developing rapidly, these policies may change. Please check relevant websites for updated services and policy information, and contact us at ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov with questions.

Please contact ConsultNCLER@acl.hhs.gov for free case consultation assistance. Sign up for our email list and access more resources at NCLER.acl.gov.