

Guidance for Benefits Counseling Services

ODP Announcement 25-001

AUDIENCE:

Individuals and Families, Administrative Entities, Supports Coordination Organizations, Providers, State Center Training Coordinators, and all other interested stakeholders.

PURPOSE:

To provide information about:

- The Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program, including when referrals to a WIPA program are required.
- How to locate WIPA programs in Pennsylvania.
- Benefits Counseling services funded through ODP's Consolidated, Community Living, and Person/Family Directed Supports (P/FDS) Waivers.

DISCUSSION:

What is the WIPA program?

WIPA is a program funded by the Social Security Administration to provide information to individuals with a disability about work and benefits. The WIPA program is designed to support individuals receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) who are working or interested in working.

The WIPA program seeks to help individuals reach their financial and employment goals by:

- Providing information about available work supports.
- Offering individualized information about benefits and health insurance.
- Explaining the impact working may have on benefits.

As part of their services, the WIPA program verifies an individual's benefits to both ensure accurate advice and deliver in-depth counseling tailored to the individual's circumstances. This support empowers individuals to make informed decisions about work, and how to achieve their personal and professional goals.

How does the WIPA program work?

If an individual is receiving Social Security disability benefits and is interested in working, they may be eligible for services from a WIPA program. These services are available to anyone who is receiving SSDI or SSI and:

- Is between the ages of 14 and 65, **and**
- Is either currently employed or preparing to enter the workforce, even if just beginning a job search.

Additionally, an individual between the ages of 14 and 25 who is a recipient of SSDI or SSI must be referred to a WIPA program, through the Ticket to Work Helpline, even if they are not currently working or seeking employment.

After being referred to a WIPA program, individuals work with a Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) who will help them to understand and plan for any effects employment may have on their benefits. A CWIC will assist individuals through the development of a Work Incentives Plan so that they can make the best use of the many options available to support their employment goals.

What is Benefits Counseling?

Benefits counseling is designed to empower and assist individuals in making informed decisions about employment and financial goals. Benefits counseling provides individuals with information about how working may impact a variety of benefit programs, such as SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, housing subsidies, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP). Benefits counseling is essential for understanding how to maintain and maximize benefits while earning an income. Benefits Counseling services may be available through State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, Employment Networks (EN), WIPA programs, or 1915(c) waiver services.

Are Benefits Counseling Services Available Through ODP?

Yes. ODP offers Benefits Counseling services through the Consolidated, Community Living, and P/FDS waivers. However, ODP Benefits Counseling services are typically only provided after all other options for Benefits Counseling services have been explored and exhausted. If Benefits Counseling services are available through another funding source, it is a federal requirement to utilize these sources before ODP can fund Benefits Counseling services.

When can ODP fund Benefits Counseling Services?

Benefits Counseling services funded through ODP may be provided after Benefits Counseling services provided by a CWIC through a Pennsylvania-based federal WIPA program were sought and it was determined and documented by the Supports Coordinator that such services were not available either because of ineligibility or because services are not available within thirty (30) calendar days. The thirty (30) day period begins after the date of the first documented contact with the Ticket to Work Helpline.

In recognition that individuals may need more information about how working may impact their benefits before deciding to actively pursue employment, ODP may allow individuals enrolled for ODP services to receive ODP funded Benefits Counseling services without first being referred to a WIPA program.

Effective January 1, 2025, an individual enrolled to receive services through the Consolidated, Community Living, or P/FDS waivers may receive ODP funded Benefits Counseling services without being referred to a WIPA program if they are age 26 ¹ or older and meet any one of the following:

- Are not currently working, including self-employment and part-time work.
- Do not currently have any pending or outstanding job offers.
- Are not actively interviewing for jobs.
- Have not interviewed for a job within the last thirty (30) days.

¹ Individuals age 14 through 25 must be referred through WIPA.

Are there any other limits to ODP funded Benefits Counseling Services?

ODP Benefits Counseling services may not be available if services are available through the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). If an individual is already actively working with OVR for employment or vocational rehabilitation services, they should exhaust any available Benefits Counseling or Planning services available through OVR before receiving ODP funded Benefits Counseling services. However, it is not necessary for an individual to be referred to OVR solely to receive Benefits Counseling or Planning services.

Additional limits to ODP funded Benefits Counseling services include:

- Benefits Counseling services may not be provided at the same time as the direct provision of any of the following ODP services:
 - o Small Group Employment
 - o Supported Employment.
 - o Advanced Supported Employment (job acquisition and job retention).
 - o Transportation.
 - o Education Support.
 - o Therapies.
 - o Music, Art, and Equine Assisted Therapy.
 - o Consultative Nutritional Services and
 - o Communication Specialist.

- Benefits Counseling services are limited to a maximum of 96 (15-minute) units which is equal to 24 hours per participant per fiscal year for any combination of initial benefits counseling, supplementary benefits counseling when a participant is evaluating a job offer/promotion or a self-employment opportunity, or problem-solving assistance to maintain competitive integrated employment.

How to contact a WIPA Program?

For additional information, contact the Ticket to Work Program to find a service provider that offers benefits counseling in two ways:

- Call the Ticket to Work Helpline Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. ET, at 1-866-968-7842 or 1-866-833-2967 (TTY), or
- Use the Find Help tool on the Choose Work website to find service providers on your own.

As of November 2024, the current Pennsylvania WIPA programs are:

- **AHEDD**

Sarah Guyer-Marshall: Program Director/CWIC

Sarah.guyer-marshall@ahedd.org

3300 Trindle Road, Camp Hill, PA, 17011

Phone Number: 866-902-4333

TTY Number: 800-829-6210

Website: <https://ahedd.org/work-incentive-counseling/>

Counties: Adams, Allegheny, Armstrong, Bedford, Blair, Bradford, Butler, Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Crawford, Cumberland, Dauphin, Elk, Erie, Forest, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Indiana, Jefferson, Juniata, Lycoming, McKean, Mifflin, Perry, Potter, Snyder, Sullivan, Tioga, Union, Venango, Warren, Westmoreland.

- **West Virginia Research Corporation**

Jennifer Tenney: Program Director/CWIC

jtenney@hsc.wvu.edu

959 Hartman Run Rd., Morgantown, WV, 26505



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Phone: 904-293-4692

Website: <https://wipa.cedwvu.org/>

Counties Served: Beaver, Fayette, Greene, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Washington.

- **Disability Rights Pennsylvania**

Martine M. DeLorenzo: WIPA Program Director

mdelorenzo@disabilityrightspa.org

1800 JFK Boulevard, Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Phone: 800-692-7443

TTY Number: 877-375-7139

Website: <https://www.disabilityrightspa.org/>

Counties: Berks, Bucks, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Montgomery, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Pike, Schuylkill, Susquehanna, Wayne, Wyoming, York

- **Full Circle Employment Solutions, LLC**

Samantha Loicano: Program Director/CWIC

samantha.loicano@fullcircledc.com

P.O. Box 7030, Hyattsville, MD, 20787

Phone: 800-692-7443 Ext. 309

Website: <https://fullcircledc.com/wipa>

Counties: Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia



For additional questions please contact ODP's Employment Leads:

- Statewide Employment Lead: Nolan Schaaf, nschaaf@pa.gov
- Western Region: Brian Dengler, brdengler@pa.gov
- Central Region: Tom Flynn, thoflynn@pa.gov
- Northeast Region: Eric O'Neill, erioneill@pa.gov
- Southeast Region: Mary Citko, mcitko@pa.gov