



17 BENEFITS FOR OLDER NEW YORKERS

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INTRODUCTION

As a New Yorker, age 60 or older, you may be missing out on dollar benefits and community services that could be yours. In these benefit notes, you'll find important facts: how finances and age affect eligibility and little-known rules regarding eligibility.

Each county in New York State, outside of New York City, has an Office for Aging.

If you are unable to contact your local Office for Aging, you should contact the State Office for Aging at (800) 342-9871. The New York City Human Resources Administration information and referral number is (877) 472-8411. This pamphlet introduces seventeen major benefit programs:

1. Social Security
2. Medicare
3. Medicare Buy-In
4. Medicaid
5. SSI (Supplemental Security Income)
6. Temporary Assistance
7. Veterans Benefits
8. EPIC Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage
9. Food Stamps
10. Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)
11. Weatherization Referral and Packaging Program (WRAP)
12. Senior Citizen Rent Increase (SCRIE)
13. Senior Citizen Homeowners Exemption (SCHE)
14. Real Property Tax Credit
15. Reduced Fare

16. New York State School Tax Relief Program (STAR)

17. Life Line Telephone Service

In addition, there is brief discussion of non-cash programs which benefit seniors.

General Eligibility Rules

Because financial requirements vary, check with the individual program. Refer to the following as a broad guideline.

Resources that usually affect eligibility are cash, bank accounts, investments and valuables. Resources that generally do not count are a home, car, income-producing property and personal effects. There are usually special rules for separated or non-eligible spouses and for “spending down” resources.

Before transferring the ownership of your home or resources, consult an Elder-Law Attorney.

Income: Both earned and unearned usually count. Unearned income includes social security, supplemental security income, pensions, interest, valuable gifts. Earned income is wages for work performed. In-kind income—when others pay for services—may or may not be counted. Check with each program. Because eligibility is often based on net income, look for deductions that may make you eligible.

Apply: even when you are not sure that you qualify. You may apply by mail, phone, in person, through an authorized representative or, if homebound, by requesting an in-home interview.

The income and resource numbers in this pamphlet are the 2010 figures. The income and resource levels may increase annually.

Please check with the appropriate agency if you are using this pamphlet after 2010.

1. SOCIAL SECURITY – Income for insured workers, certain spouses, divorced spouses, children, grandchildren and surviving parents.

Age: Eligible at any age—disabled worker, a spouse caring for a retired, disabled or deceased worker’s minor child or adult disabled child; at 50, a worker’s surviving disabled spouse; at 60, a worker’s surviving spouse; at 62, a retired worker, retired spouse, a worker’s surviving dependent parents; divorced spouses can receive benefits if married for ten years. Ask about benefits for minor children.

Resources: No limit.

Income: No limit.

Retirement Earnings Test: Beneficiaries who have reached full retirement age (65 to 67, depending on year of birth) may receive full Social Security benefits even if they continue to work. If you work and are under full retirement age, your Social Security benefits will be reduced based upon earned income.

Apply: Contact the Social Security Administration for more information. Applications are filed with Social Security Administration. Call (800) 772-1213 to find your local office.

Internet website is www.ssa.gov.

2. MEDICARE – Helps pay certain health care costs.

Age: 65 or older. TO AVOID PENALTIES, APPLY WHEN FIRST ELIGIBLE, EVEN IF

NOT APPLYING FOR SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS. Disabled individuals under age 65 are eligible for Medicare after receiving Social Security disability benefits for 24 months. Special rules also apply for dialysis patients and individuals who have Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or end stage renal disease.

Resources: No limit. (See below)

Income: No limit. (See below)

Part A- Hospital Insurance

Anyone 65 or over who is eligible to receive Social Security or Railroad Retirement benefits is automatically eligible and pays no premium. Others may purchase this insurance for a monthly premium. In 2010, Part A covers all in-patient hospitalization costs in any benefit period, except for a deductible of \$1,100 and a co-pay of \$275 per day for days 61 through 90, and \$554 per day for days 91 through 150.

Skilled Care in a Nursing Facility is covered for up to 100 days following at least a three-day hospitalization in any benefit period with a co-insurance of \$137.50 per day for days 21 through 100.

Home Care and Hospice Services are also available. Co-insurance and deductible payments are adjusted annually.

Part B - Medical Insurance

The minimum monthly premium is \$96.40 (in 2010). Individuals with annual income over \$85,000 (\$170,000 for married couples) will pay a higher monthly premium based on a sliding scale of income. Newly applied Medicare Part B beneficiaries will also pay a higher premium (\$110.50 in 2010). Medicare beneficiaries who do not have their Part B premium deducted from their Social Security

check will also pay the higher premium of \$110.50 (in 2010). Medicare pays 80% of the approved charge and the beneficiary is responsible for both the 20% co-pay and an annual deductible of \$155. *Note: There is a cap on fees doctors may charge—in New York, the cap is 5% above the Medicare approved limit. (This limit does not apply to home or office visits.)*

Free assistance is available from the Medicare Rights Center (800) 333-4114; (212) 890-3850; from the Health Insurance Counseling and Assistance Program (HIICAP) (800) 701-015. NYC residents may also call the NYC HIICAP help line (212) 333-5511.

Apply: To Social Security Administration/Medicare (800) 772-1213; Internet website is www.medicare.gov; www.hiicap.state.ny.us.

Part C - Medicare Advantage

Medicare Advantage Plans cover all Part A and Part B services. Care is provided by private companies as an alternative to traditional Medicare Parts A and B. Premiums and co-payments may be lower than traditional Medicare, but all care must be provided or approved by the Managed Care Plan. Many plans include prescription drug coverage. For information and assistance, call (800) 633-4227 or go to www.medicare.gov website.

Part D - Prescription Drug Coverage

Medicare Part D prescription coverage is provided by a variety of private plans. Unlike Parts A and B, people must take action to enroll in Part D. Premiums and the extent of coverage for the many private plans vary widely. The basic Part D benefit requires a minimum deductible of \$310 (in 2010) and then the plan pays its share until what they

have paid (plus the deductible) reaches \$2,830. There is then a coverage gap of \$4,550. Once the consumer has paid \$4,550 out of pocket for the year, the plan should pay the majority of prescription expenses (less a small co-pay for each drug) for the rest of the year. See internet website at: www.medicare.gov (The website contains various search engines which enable consumers to search for a local plan. However, the website may not contain the most updated information and may have errors. Consumers should check with local providers before enrolling in a plan to make sure the information provided on the website is accurate.

Resources: No limit for basic.

— Extra Help - Individual \$12,510; Couple \$25,010.

Income: No limit for basic.

— Low Income Subsidy - Individual \$1,354 monthly maximum; Couple \$1,821 monthly maximum.

Apply/Enroll: By calling (800) MEDICARE; (800) 633-4227.

3. MEDICARE SAVINGS PROGRAM – Limited income, Medicare-eligible individuals may be able to have Medicaid cover their Medicare monthly premiums, deductibles and co-insurance.

Age: Any person eligible for Medicare.

Resources: \$4,000 for individuals; \$6,000 for couples.

Income: Below \$923 per month for individuals, below \$1,235 for couples.), Medicaid will pay all Part A, Part B premiums and all deductibles and co-insurance;

Between \$923 to \$1,103 per month for individuals, \$1,235 to \$1,477 for couples, Medicaid will pay the full Medicare Part B premium;

For individuals with income between \$1,103 and \$1,239 per month (\$1,477 to \$1,660 for couples), Medicaid will pay some part of the Medicare Part B premium.

Please note that these income figures are usually adjusted on an annual basis. Health insurance premiums are an allowable deduction in determining income. This program is not retroactive; the sooner you apply, the sooner you receive benefits.

Apply: To your local Department of Social Services or CMS at (800) 633-4227. New York City residents, call (877) 472-8411.

For more information search for “Medicare Savings Program” through the NYS DOH website: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/>.

4. MEDICAID – Full range of health care services, including many not provided by Medicare (home care, unlimited nursing home care, prescription drugs, dentistry, eyeglasses, hearing aids, etc.).

Age: Any age. Persons receiving SSI or temporary assistance are automatically eligible. If under 65 and not receiving SSI or temporary assistance, must be determined to be disabled or blind.

Resources: \$13,800 individual, \$20,100 couple (2010).

Exemptions from Resources:

—\$1,500 burial fund per person, or irrevocable prepaid funeral agreement (any amount);

—cash value of life insurance with face value of more than \$1,500 is counted toward the

\$1,500 burial fund, the remaining balance is a resource.

A home with a value up to \$750,000, personal effects and a car are not counted as resources.

NOTE: *There are complex rules for transfer of assets by persons applying for Medicaid.* See below.

Income: 767 per month for an individual; \$1,117 per month for a couple.

Surplus Income/Spenddown: Even if income exceeds the limit noted above, individuals may qualify for community Medicaid (including home health care) if they incur or pay medical charges equal to their excess countable income. There is no penalty for transfer of assets when applying for community Medicaid (some home care services, some adult day care programs, prescription drug coverage, etc.). Disabled individuals may deposit their surplus income to a supplemental needs trust.

Transfer of Resources and Income Rules: If one spouse is institutionalized, the spouse in the community may keep at least \$2,739 per month of the couple's combined income after deducting health insurance premiums. The resource allowance for the community spouse is between \$74,820 and \$109,560. The community spouse (well spouse) may request a hearing or go to court to obtain higher income or resource allowances. **DO NOT TRANSFER OWNERSHIP OF A HOME OR RESOURCES WITHOUT CONSULTING AN ELDER LAW ATTORNEY.**

Apply: Contact local Department of Social Services (866) 881-2809 for local numbers; NYC residents, call Human Resources Administration (877) 472-8411). See websites: www.hcfa.gov/medicaid; www.health.state.ny.us.

5. SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)

– Monthly payments to limited-income aged, blind and disabled persons, in addition to other income they may be receiving, including Social Security.

Age: 65 or older. (Any age if disabled or blind.)

Resources: \$2,000 per month individual, \$3,000 for couple, plus burial fund of \$1,500 per person. Resources may be spent down, or resources of persons under 65 may be transferred to a Supplemental Needs Trust without incurring a period of ineligibility. **CONSULT AN ELDER LAW ATTORNEY BEFORE TRANSFERRING RESOURCES.**

Income: Generally, the more income you have, the lower the SSI payment. Applicants living with others may receive a reduced benefit. Loans do not count as income. For advice regarding benefit reductions due to living arrangements or receipt of loan repayments, consult a private or legal services attorney. In 2010, the maximum monthly benefit is \$761 per an individual/\$1,115 couple. Wages of more than \$1,000 per month generally cause benefits for disabled individuals to be discontinued. However, in some instances, a working individual may earn more than the limit and remain eligible for SSI.

Apply: Social Security Administration (800) 772-1213.

Internet website is www.ssa.gov.

6. TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE – Cash benefits for limited-income persons for essential food, clothing and shelter, one-shot deals.

Age: Any age. Individuals who are over age 60 or disabled may be exempt from work requirements.

Resources: Maximum of \$2,000 for an individual (\$3,000 if any household member is 60 or over); ask about automobile, life insurance and burial space.

Employed individuals may be entitled to “disregard” some of their earnings and still be eligible for benefits. Allowances are also provided for certain work-related expenses and/or special needs (travel, child care, restaurant meals, etc.).

There is a 60 month limit to most public assistance programs, although the exemption does not apply to individuals who are elderly or disabled.

Emergency Assistance: Assistance to pay rent arrears, heat/utility repairs, moving costs, storage deposits, furniture to set up a household, repairs. Emergency Food Stamps and Medicaid may also be available for those who meet certain requirements. Applicants who are not otherwise eligible for temporary assistance may qualify for emergency assistance if they demonstrate a financial emergency and that they have spent all of their cash resources.

Apply: To local Department of Social Services for all public assistance programs based upon your zip code. Your local office's contact information is available at (800) 342-3009. In NYC, residents apply to HRA (877) 472-8411.

Internet Websites www.wnylc.net; www.legal-aid.org.

7. VETERANS BENEFITS – Pensions for limited-income and disabled veterans; health care and prescription drugs; vocational rehabilitation; education; home loans; disability compensation; survivor benefits; life insurance; survivor benefits; life insurance; burial and other benefits.

Age: Veterans of any age may be eligible for a range of services. Their dependents and survivors may also be eligible for certain benefits. Disability is determined by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Resources: Subject to review based on benefits requested.

Income: Limits vary with benefits. Medical benefits may include care at VA Hospitals, out-patient services, skilled nursing facilities, allowances for home care, etc.

Apply: NYS Division of Veterans Affairs at (888) 838-7697; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (800) 827-1000.

Websites: www.va.gov; www.veterans.ny.gov.

8. ELDER PHARMACEUTICAL INSURANCE COVERAGE PROGRAM (EPIC) – Pays more than one-half the cost of most prescription drugs after beneficiary pays premium or deductible.

Age: 65 or older.

Resources: No limit.

Income: \$35,000 (individual), \$50,000 (couple), including Social Security. Each person's premium or deductible is determined by

income and marital status. Co-payments vary with prescription costs. Pharmacies must be EPIC participants. Approved drugs include insulin and syringes. EPIC members are required to have a Medicare Part D Plan as well as their EPIC coverage, unless the member's Medicare coverage is with a Medicare HMO, PPO, or Medicare Advantage Plan.

Apply: To EPIC (800) 332-3742; (518) 862-9936.

Website: www.nyhealth.gov/health_care/epic; http://www.health.state.ny.us/health_care/epic/index.htm.

9. FOOD STAMPS – For buying food in stores, home-delivered meals, meals in senior centers, some restaurants and select farmers markets.

Age: Any Age.

Resources: For most households with an elderly or disabled member, there is no limit on resources if income is within 200 percent of the Poverty Income Guidelines. Effective July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010, this means that if monthly income does not exceed \$1,805 for a household of one or \$2,428 for a household of two, there is no limit on resources.

Income: Seniors are encouraged to apply because allowable earned and unearned income is calculated individually based upon living expenses, household size and other factors. There are special deductions for health-related expenses and shelter costs. Those living with others, but not sharing expenses, can be budgeted separately.

Website: www.mybenefits.ny.gov; <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/foodstamps/>

Apply: To local Department of Social Services/ Human Resources Administration, or call (800) 342-3009. New York City residents, call (877) 472-8411.

10. HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HEAP) – Cash or credit for homeowners and renters; heat-related emergency grants.

Age: Any Age.

Resources: No limit.

Income: For the 2009-2010 heating season: Individual - \$2,030.00 per month maximum; Couple - \$2,657 per month maximum. Ask about subtracting certain health care and rental income expenses.

Heat Emergencies: Only HEAP-eligible households paying directly for heat may apply for help with fuel, repair of heat-related equipment and temporary relocation.

Questions regarding the HEAP program should be directed to your Local Department of Social Services Office or the NYS HEAP Hotline at (800) 342-3009.

Website <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/heap/>

11. WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (WAP) - assists income-eligible families and individuals by reducing their heating/cooling costs and improving the safety of their homes through energy efficiency measures.

Age: Any age.

Resources: No Limit.

Income: Households with incomes at or below 60% of state median income are eligible for

assistance. Program services are available to both homeowners and renters, with priority given to senior citizens, families with children and persons with disabilities. In 2009-2010, services are available to individuals with income below \$2,030 per month and couples below \$2,654 per month. Additional income levels apply for larger households.

Apply: Funds are limited but applications by the elderly and disabled receive a priority. Contact your local Office for Aging or New York City HRA for more information.

Internet Website for the New York State Office of the Aging is: <http://www.dhcr.state.ny.us/programs/weatherizationassistance/>

Internet Website for the New York City HRA is: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/directory/heap.shtml>

12. SENIOR CITIZEN RENT INCREASE EXEMPTION (SCRIE) -Exempts rent-controlled/rent stabilized, Mitchell-Lama and hotel tenants from certain rent increases.

Age: 62 or over

Resources: No limit.

Income: \$29,000 per year maximum (less certain deductions) for those within NYC. Outside NYC, SCRIE is a local option and communities that have adopted it have different income eligibility limits and exemption allowances.

Rent with increase must be at least one-third of net monthly income (and a rent-stabilized tenant must have a valid one or two year lease). SCRIE covers increases for renewal lease, maximum base rent increases, fuel, landlord hardship and major capital improvements. NYC senior citizen tenants may also carry this exemption from one apartment to another upon moving, upon

the proper application being made to the Department of Finance (DOF).

Apply: NYC: Department of Finance (DOF)
Outside NYC: New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR)

Internet Website is: <http://www.dhcr.state.ny.us/Rent/about.htm#seniors>

13. SENIOR CITIZEN HOMEOWNERS EXEMPTION (SCHE) - Up to 50% reduction in taxes for qualified property owners.

Age: 65 or older by December 31st of that property tax year. If spouse or siblings are co-owners, one must be at least 65 years of age. If other persons are co-owners, all must be 65 years of age. Legal residence, limited to one, two or three-family houses, a condominium or a cooperative apartment. Property must be used exclusively as legal residence.

Resources: No limit.

Income: Income limits vary by locality. In NYC, the net combined amount must be less than \$37,400. Eligible homeowners may qualify for a reduction of 5%-50% (depending on income). Income is combined Federal income for all owners reduced by unreimbursed medical and prescription drug expenses (at local governmental option).

Applicant must have held title to property for at least 12 consecutive months prior to March 15 of the year when the exemption goes into effect. The property must be used exclusively for residential purposes and have no more than three units.

The period in which to apply is limited. Exemption applications must be filed with the local assessor's office. Exemption Applications are required to be received, generally, on or before the Taxable Status

Date of the current year. March 1 is the Taxable Status Date for most municipalities; however, it varies for some cities and counties. If the Taxable Status Date falls on a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday, the deadline for filing the exemption application is extended until the next business day.

For more Information go to Internet Website:
<http://www.orps.state.ny.us/exemption/exemptionAppDeadlines.cfm>

Apply: NYC: Apply by mail to the NYC Department of Finance. Outside NYC: Contact your local assessment office for filing deadlines. Applications must be made in person. Bring deed to property, proof of income, birth and residency. The exemption is renewable every second year. Those who qualify for SCHE will also automatically receive the Enhanced STAR exemption.

Internet Website is: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/property/property_tax_reduc_individual.shtml#sche

14. REAL PROPERTY TAX CREDIT (IT 214) - Provides tax credit or cash payment for part of rent or property taxes paid during previous year.

Age: Any age.

Resources: No limit.

Income: \$18,000 or less for tax year 2009 (Filing a tax return for the preceding year is not a requirement.)

Must have been a New York State resident for all of 2009 and occupied the same New York residence for six months or more. You could not be claimed as a dependent on another taxpayer's federal income tax return.

Homeowner's current market value of real property must be \$85,000 or less. Any rent

you received for nonresidential use of your residence was 20% or less of the total rent you received. Renter's average monthly rent must be \$450 or less, not including heat, gas, electricity, furnishings or board.

If all members of your household are under 65, the maximum credit is \$75. If at least one member of your household is 65 or older, the maximum is \$375. If your credit is more than the taxes you owe, a refund can be claimed.

Apply: by submitting Form IT-214 with tax return, or, if no return, anytime during the year. For assistance from New York State Department of Taxation and Finance call (800) 225-5829.

Internet Website is: http://www.tax.state.ny.us/pit/income_tax/real_property_tax_credit.htm

15. REDUCED FARE - Substantial savings for various public and private transit services.

Age: 65 or younger individual with qualifying disability:

Resources: No limit.

Income: No limit

New York City has reduced fares for subway and buses. Residents 65 and older must show their Medicare card or other proof of age to obtain a Reduced Fare Metro Card. For information, contact the New York City Department for the Aging at (212) 442-1000 or go to the internet website at: <http://www.mta.info/nyct/fare/rfindex.htm>.

Apply: by contacting the New York State Office of Aging at (800) 342-9871 for information concerning appropriate agencies in your community or for a listing of the local offices for the aging go to the internet website at: <http://www.aging.ny.gov/>

NYSOFA/LocalOffices.cfm.

Internet Website for the New York State Office of the Aging is: <http://www.aging.ny.gov/ResourceGuide/Transportation.cfm>

16. NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL TAX RELIEF PROGRAM (STAR) - Provides an exemption from the school portion of property taxes for owner-occupied primary residences. All New Yorkers who own their own one, two or three-family homes, condominiums, or cooperative apartments, mobile homes or farms are eligible for the STAR tax exemption.

Basic STAR Exemption:

Age: Any age.

Resources: No limit.

Income: No limit.

Basic STAR is available to anyone who owns and lives in his or her own home and the home is their primary residence. Basic STAR exempts the first \$30,000 of the full value of a home from school taxes.

Apply: By contacting local assessor's office or by accessing the necessary STAR Reimbursement Application Form available when you go to the internet website at: <http://www.orps.state.ny.us/ref/forms/index.htm>. New York City residents should call the New York City Department of Finance at 311 or (212) 504-4080 or go to the internet website at http://www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/property/property_tax_reduc_individual.shtml.

Internet Website for the New York State Office of Real Property is: <http://www.orps.state.ny.us/star/index.cfm>

Middle Class STAR Exemption: Rebate program

The Middle Class STAR Exemption Rebate Program has been repealed. No rebates will be issued for 2009. If you have outstanding issues related to the 2008 or 2007 program, send a letter to the NYS Tax Department. Provide as much information as possible about your property and include a daytime telephone number.

Enhanced STAR Exemption:

Age: 65 or older.

Resources: No limit.

Income: Annual household income of \$73,000 or less.

The Enhanced STAR exemption for the primary residences of senior citizens exempts the first \$60,100 of the full value of the home from school property taxes (2010-2011 school tax year). For property owned by a husband and wife, or by siblings, only one of them must be at least 65 years of age as of December 31 of the year in which the exemption will begin to qualify for the Enhanced exemption. Their combined annual income, however, must not exceed the STAR income standard.

Apply: To your local assessor's office or contact the New York State Office of Real Property at (518) 474-2982. For a listing of your local assessors offices go to the internet website at <http://www.orps.state.ny.us/MuniPro/>.

The necessary STAR Reimbursement Application Form available when you go to the internet website at: http://www.orps.state.ny.us/star/star_forms.cfm.

New York City residents should call the New York City Department of Finance at 311 or (212) 504-4080 or go to the internet website at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/>

property/property_tax_reduc_individual.shtml.

Internet Website for the New York State Office of Real Property is: <http://www.orps.state.ny.us/star/index.cfm>

17. LIFE LINE TELEPHONE SERVICE - Reduces the cost of basic telephone service and connection charges for limited-income persons.

Age: Any Age.

Eligibility: The Life Line Program is available to income-eligible telephone customers who participate in, or are eligible to participate in, any one or more of the following programs: SSI, HEAP, Food Stamps, Medicaid, Veterans Disability or Surviving Spouse Pension, Family Assistance, Safety Net Assistance. The beneficiary will not be subject to a subscriber line charge and is entitled to at least \$6.50 off each monthly bill.

Apply: by contacting your local telephone company business office.

Internet Website is: www.askpsc.com/. From that homepage, follow the links to the "Life Line Discounted Telephone Services" or call for information at (888) Ask-PSC1 ((888) 275-7721).



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