


**Introduction to WIPA Services**

 **VCU**

**Work Incentives Planning and Assistance  
National Training and Data Center**

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## What is “WIPA”?

- Acronym for Work Incentives Planning & Assistance.
- Provides individualized, in-depth, employment focused benefits counseling and work incentives planning in all 50 states and US territories.
- Funded primarily by the Social Security Administration.
- Critical component of national effort to improve employment outcomes for Social Security disability beneficiaries.

## A little background ...

- WIPA was created as part of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999.
- Social Security has cooperative agreements with 83 community agencies to provide WIPA services.
- WIPA projects are staffed by trained and certified Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs).
- To date, WIPA projects have served more than 750,000 individuals.

## WIPA is all about WORK!

The mission of the WIPA program is to **promote employment** and **financial independence** for beneficiaries of the Social Security disability programs.

## WIPA Goals

1. Increase the number of Social Security disability beneficiaries who choose to work for pay;
2. Support disability beneficiaries in successfully maintaining paid employment (or self-employment) over time;

## WIPA Goals (continued)

3. Provide work incentives counseling that enables beneficiaries to increase their earnings capacity over time and enhance the financial benefit of working; and
4. Reduce beneficiary dependence on disability benefits and other income support programs.

## Common Myths about WIPA

- Intended to force beneficiaries off disability benefits.
- Protects beneficiaries from ever losing benefits due to work.
- Helps beneficiaries maximize benefits.
- Performs all wage reporting and benefits management for beneficiaries.
- Representative payee service.

## Important Facts about WIPA Services

- WIPA services are employment focused.
- CWICs don't report beneficiary information to Social Security or manage benefits. CWICs teach beneficiaries how to communicate effectively with Social Security and provide support to help beneficiaries manage their benefits independently.
- WIPA projects conduct most of their work using distance technology.

## More Facts about WIPA Services

- CWICs don't provide employment services or supports directly to beneficiaries. CWICs help beneficiaries decide what employment services they will need to be successful in employment and then connect beneficiaries with agencies that can meet those needs.
- Social Security prohibits WIPA projects from engaging in certain activities. CWICs may not assist with the benefits application process and may not represent beneficiaries in the appeals process.

## What can WIPA do for beneficiaries?

Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) can help:

- Verify all benefits information.
- Identify and connect with services or supports needed to overcome barriers to employment.
- Understand how paid employment will affect all federal/state/local benefits.
- Identify, use, and manage Social Security work incentives.

## CWICs can also ...

- Support beneficiaries with reporting wage information to Social Security.
- Help beneficiaries to successfully manage benefits over time.
- Analyze healthcare coverage options so that beneficiaries can determine which options offer the best coverage at the most affordable price.
- Resolve benefits problems.

## CWIC Qualifications

To provide WIPA services, CWICs must:

- Undergo background check and receive security clearance from Social Security;
- Complete a rigorous initial training and two-part assessment process to achieve certification; and
- Complete ongoing training to maintain certification.

CWICs access training and technical support provided by VCU's National Training & Data Center (NTDC).

## Who is eligible for WIPA Services?

- Disabled (or blind) per Social Security's definition;
- Already receiving Social Security benefits based on disability or blindness (SSI or a title II disability benefit such as SSDI, CDB or DWB); and
- At least age 14, but not yet full retirement age.

## WIPA Priorities

- Social Security has established clear priorities that CWICs are expected to follow.
- While all eligible beneficiaries will receive information and referral (I&R) services, individualized services are typically reserved for beneficiaries who are closest to employment.
- Beneficiaries who have general questions should be contact the Ticket Help Line for assistance.

## Beneficiary Prioritization in the WIPA Program

Priority Group 1: Individuals who are currently working or engaging in self-employment and have both a need for and interest in receiving individualized work incentives planning and assistance services.

Priority Group 2: Beneficiaries who are actively pursuing employment or self-employment and who are interested in receiving work-related benefits counseling. This includes:

- Beneficiaries with a clear employment goal who are conducting an active and regular job search; and
- Beneficiaries with a clear employment goal who have taken active steps to prepare for achieving that goal.

## More on Beneficiary Prioritization

- Social Security prioritizes serving transition age youth interested in work is a WIPA priority separate from priority groups 1 and 2.
- Social Security defines transition age youth as being at least 14 years old through the age of 25.
- WIPA projects serve transition age youth even if they are in the earlier stages of considering work or preparing for work.



## How do I make referrals for WIPA?

Call our intake line to make request

(503) 323-9159

1(833) 438-7308 toll-free statewide

Email: [pfw@vccu.edu](mailto:pfw@vccu.edu)

We will then send  
packet of forms

A project of  
Disability Rights Oregon



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## WIPA Referral Tips

- Be sure to refer eligible beneficiaries.
- Refer beneficiaries BEFORE employment begins whenever possible.
- Help educate beneficiaries about WIPA services so they know what to expect.
- When in doubt, refer beneficiaries to the Ticket to Work Help Line for assistance.



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## Ticket to Work Help Line

- 1-866-968-7842 (V) or 1-866-833-2967 (TTY). Lines are open from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. EST.
- The Help Line provides general information about the Ticket to Work Program, the WIPA program, and how work affects Social Security benefits.
- The Help Line also provides an intermediary service to screen and refine referrals to the WIPA projects. The purpose is to identify the individuals who NEED individualized WIPA services and to facilitate and encourage the connection.

## Sharing the Good News about Work and Benefits

- Mythology about work and benefits is wide-spread – many fears are based on incorrect information.
- Help spread the truth about how employment affects Social Security disability benefits and associated medical insurance.
- Everyone must communicate the same positive message to overcome fears.

## The Message

- Paid employment and Social Security disability benefits don't have to be mutually exclusive.
- It's possible to work (even full-time) and keep Medicaid and/or Medicare in almost every case.
- It's possible to work and come out ahead financially even if benefits are reduced or ceased.
- It's possible to get benefits back again if lost due to employment.



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## Contact your local WIPA provider at:

511 SW 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 200  
Portland, OR 97205

(503) 323-0150

1(833) 438-7300  
statewide

Email: [pfw@dr.org](mailto:pfw@dr.org)



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