

Proposed Extension of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands

November 4, 2021

This Insight discusses Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and its proposed extension to American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands under [House Rules Committee Print 117-18 \(November 3, 2021\)](#), showing the text of H.R. 5376 (“Build Back Better Act”), as reported by the House Budget Committee, with modifications.

SSI

SSI is a federal cash-assistance program that provides monthly benefits to aged, blind, or disabled individuals (including blind or disabled children) who have limited income and resources (assets). It provides a flat monthly benefit of **\$794 in 2021 (\$1,191 for couples)**, which is reduced by any countable income. SSI is administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) but is not part of the [Social Security program](#).

SSI was established under [Title XVI of the Social Security Act](#) by the Social Security Amendments of 1972 (P.L. 92-603). It replaced the Social Security Act’s [adult assistance programs](#)—Old-Age Assistance ([OAA, Title I](#)); Aid to the Blind ([AB, Title X](#)); Aid to the Permanently and Totally Disabled ([APTD, Title XIV](#)); and Aid to the Aged, Blind, or Disabled ([AABD, Title XVI as it existed prior to reenactment](#) by P.L. 92-603)—in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, effective in 1974.

Among [other requirements](#), a person must be a resident of the United States to qualify for SSI. [Section 1614\(e\)](#) of the Social Security Act defines the term *United States* to mean the 50 states and the District of Columbia for SSI purposes. Because [Section 502\(a\)\(1\)](#) of P.L. 94-241 extends SSI to the Northern Mariana Islands on the same terms as the states, SSA’s [regulations](#) include the Northern Mariana Islands in the definition of *United States* for SSI purposes. Individuals who are not residing in one of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, or the Northern Mariana Islands are [ineligible for SSI](#) (limited exceptions apply).

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IN11793

A person must also meet citizenship or immigration-related requirements. [Section 1614\(a\)\(1\)\(B\)](#) of the Social Security Act specifies that U.S. citizens and [certain noncitizens](#) may qualify for SSI. Under its [regulations](#), SSA treats [U.S. nationals](#) the same as U.S. citizens for SSI purposes.

Cash Assistance in the Other Territories

SSI is not available to residents of American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. These territories are not included in the definition of *United States* for purposes of SSI's residency requirement. Moreover, [Section 303\(b\)](#) of P.L. 92-603 specifies that the reenacted Title XVI authorizing SSI does not apply to Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Further, [Section 1101\(a\)\(1\)](#) of the Social Security Act specifies that the term *state* includes Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands for adult assistance purposes but not for SSI purposes.

Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands continue to participate in the adult assistance programs, which provide [federal funding](#) to help participating territories finance the cost of furnishing cash assistance to needy seniors, individuals with blindness, and adults with disabilities other than blindness. Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands operate the separate OAA, AB, and APTD programs, while Puerto Rico operates the consolidated AABD program. The adult assistance programs are [not available in American Samoa](#).

Within [certain federal requirements](#), participating territories have broad discretion to determine the features of their adult assistance programs (e.g., income/resource limits, benefit levels), subject to approval by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the Department of Health and Human Services. Unlike SSI, which is 100% federally funded, adult assistance requires the territories to pay part of the cost. Benefit payments are split 75:25 between the federal government and territories, and administrative expenses are split 50:50. Federal funding for adult assistance is subject to territory-specific funding caps under [Section 1108\(a\) and \(c\)](#) of the Social Security Act, which apply jointly to [certain other ACF-administered programs](#). [Table 1](#) provides data for FY2020.

Table 1. SSI and Adult Assistance, FY2020

Program and Area	Average Monthly Number of Recipients	Average Monthly Payment Amount	Total Annual Spending (in thousands)
SSI			
50 States, District of Columbia, and Northern Mariana Islands	8,056,824	\$574	\$63,301,786
Adult Assistance (OAA, AB, APTD, and AABD)			
Guam	675	\$197	\$1,763
Puerto Rico	29,068	\$78	\$33,970
U.S. Virgin Islands	860	\$180	\$2,253

Source: CRS, based on SSA, "[SSI Monthly Statistics](#);" SSA, [FY2022 Budget Justification](#); and unpublished data from ACF.

Notes: Spending reflects benefit, administrative, and other costs. SSI payments and spending include federally administered [state supplements](#). SSI payments exclude retroactive payments. SSI spending reflects obligations. Adult assistance payments and spending reflect combined federal and territorial expenditures.

Proposed Extension

Section 131001 of House Rules Committee Print 117-18 (November 3, 2021; Title XIII, Subtitle J) aims to extend SSI to American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. To that end, it would:

- eliminate the bar against SSI being made available in Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands under Section 303(b) of P.L. 92-603;
- amend Section 1101(a)(1) of the Social Security Act to include American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the definition of *state* for SSI purposes; and
- amend Section 1614(e) of the Social Security Act to include American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the definition of *United States* for SSI purposes.

It would also amend Section 1614(a)(1)(B) of the Social Security Act to specify that U.S. nationals may qualify for SSI, thereby codifying in law SSA's treatment of U.S. nationals for SSI purposes. Further, it would amend Section 1108(a)(1) of the Social Security Act to eliminate the reference to the adult assistance programs from the territory-specific funding caps that apply to certain other ACF-administered programs.

Lastly, it would provide the Commissioner of Social Security with the authority to waive or modify any statutory requirement relating to the provision of benefits under the SSI program in American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to the extent the commissioner deems it necessary to adapt the program to the territory involved. The proposed changes would take effect on January 1, 2024.

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