Welcome to the January 2014 edition of Solutions, Strategies, Answers, a newsletter produced by the 18 Social Security Administration Offices in southeastern Pennsylvania. We aim to provide solutions to your Social Security issues, suggest strategies that lead to a good outcome, and of course give answers to all your questions!

This newsletter is for everyone, but we especially want to be a channel for advocates, agencies, employers, financial planners and other professionals who themselves disseminate information about Social Security programs and services.

Social Security Announces New Compassionate Allowances Conditions

On January 15, Carolyn W. Colvin, Acting Commissioner of Social Security, announced 25 new Compassionate Allowances conditions, including a dozen cancers, bringing the total number of conditions to 225.

The new conditions include disorders that affect the digestive, neurological, immune, and multiple body systems.

The Compassionate Allowances program expedites disability decisions for applicants with the most serious disabilities to ensure that they receive their benefit decisions within days instead of months or years.

For more information on the program, including a list of all Compassionate Allowances conditions, please visit www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances.

If You Are Age 65 or Older ...

If you are age 65 or older and you have not signed up for Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance), now is the time to consider doing so. The General Enrollment Period for Part B runs from January 1 through March 31 each year.

Many people enroll in Part B when they first become eligible. However, if you choose not to enroll in Part B at that time, you may have to wait until the next General Enrollment Period to apply.

Most people first become eligible for Medicare at age 65, and there is a monthly premium for Part B. In 2014, the premium for most people is $104.90, the same as in 2013. Some high-income individuals pay more than the standard premium. Your premium also can be higher if you do not enroll when you are first eligible, a timeframe known as your Initial Enrollment Period.

Under certain conditions, you can delay your Part B enrollment without later having to pay a premium penalty. Here is when you can sign up without paying higher premiums:

- In any month you are covered under a group health plan based on your own current employment or the current employment of any family member; or
- Within eight months after your employment or group health plan coverage ends, whichever comes first.

If you are disabled and working (or you have coverage from a working family member), the same rules apply.

Read our publication on Medicare at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs.
BENEFIT VERIFICATION LETTERS, OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE ONLINE

To meet the increasing demand for our services, we are making changes in how we provide some services to our customers.

Later in 2014, Social Security will stop providing benefit verification letters to visitors to our local offices. People will still be able to get a letter by creating a personal online my Social Security account, or by calling our toll-free telephone number to request one by mail.

On January 9, 2014, Social Security hosted a webinar that showed how to establish an account on my Social Security and how to get a benefit verification letter and other services offered at our website. You can view the webinar at:
http://www.socialsecurity.gov/webinars/benefitverificationlettersonline.html

In addition, to help prevent identity theft, we will discontinue providing Social Security Number printouts since they have no security features and are easily misused or counterfeited.

If you do not have your Social Security card but need proof of your Social Security Number, you will need to request a replacement card by completing the Application for a Social Security Card form and providing the required documentation.

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To receive future editions of Solutions, Strategies, Answers, send a message to edward.lafferty@ssa.gov or richard.gaudiosi@ssa.gov

Time To Prepare For Tax Season

Are Social Security benefits taxable?
Yes, for some people with higher incomes. About one third of those receiving Social Security benefits must pay taxes on some of their benefits, depending on the amount of their taxable income.

Learn more at www.socialsecurity.gov/planners/taxes.htm.

Will I get a tax form for my Social Security benefits?
Yes. Beneficiaries should receive their Social Security Benefit Statements (Form SSA-1099) for tax year 2013 on or before January 31, 2014.

If you receive Social Security and do not receive your 1099 by the end of January, you can request one online at www.socialsecurity.gov/1099.

We had a baby in 2013. Does our child need a Social Security Number?
Yes. Most people apply for their baby’s Social Security Number while they are still in the hospital at the same time they register for the birth certificate. But if you did not, you will need to apply for your child’s Social Security Number before you file your tax return in order to claim the child as a dependent. You will also need it if you ever apply for government benefits on behalf of your child or your family.

Learn more about Social Security Numbers and cards at www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.

$2,642...

...is the maximum monthly Social Security benefit in 2014 for a worker retiring at Full Retirement Age.

$1,294 is the average benefit for all retirement recipients.