

A Quick and Easy Method of Screening for Medicaid Eligibility under the Pickle Amendment

The Pickle Amendment requires that an individual is to be deemed an SSI recipient (which in many states means automatic Medicaid eligibility) if he or she:

1. Simultaneously entitled to receive both Social Security [Old Age, Survivors or Disability Insurance (OASDI)] and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in some month after April 1977;¹
2. Is currently eligible for and receiving OASDI;
3. Is currently ineligible for SSI; and
4. Receives income that would qualify him for SSI after deducting all OASDI cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) received since the last month in which he was eligible for both OASDI and SSI.

Screening for Medicaid eligibility under the Pickle Amendment is quick and simple. The screening process will eliminate the great majority of those who are not eligible without the necessity of performing any mathematical calculations. For those who survive the initial screening and for whom mathematical calculations are required, the table below provides a simple formula for performing the necessary calculations.

The screening process is as follows:

Step 1: Ask the person, “Are you now receiving a Social Security check?” If the answer is no, the person cannot be Pickle eligible. If the answer is yes, go on to the next step.

Step 2: Ask the person, “After April 1977, did you ever get an SSI check at the same time that you got Social Security, or did you get SSI in the month just before your Social Security started?” If the answer is no, the person cannot be Pickle eligible. If the answer is yes, go on to step 3.

Step 3: Ask the person, “What is the last month in which you received SSI?”

Step 4: Look up the month in which the person last received SSI in the following table. Find the percentage that applies to that month. Multiply the present amount of the person’s (and/or spouse’s) Social Security benefits by the applicable percentage.

Step 5: You have just calculated the person’s countable Social Security income under the Pickle Amendment. Add the figure that you have just calculated to any other countable income the person may have. If the resulting total is less than the current SSI income criteria in your state, the person is Pickle eligible, from the standpoint of income, for Medicaid benefits. (The person must still satisfy separate Medicaid resource and non-financial requirements.)

Example

Mrs. Ima Gherkin received both Social Security and SSI checks in 1976-78. However, her SSI was terminated in March 1978 because she started receiving a private pension that, added to her Social Security benefits, raised her income to an amount above the 1978 SSI income limits. There have been gradual increases in her income since 1978. She now receives a Social Security benefit of \$1,175 per month, which happens to be the average monthly benefit for retired workers. Her private pension is \$253 a month, giving her a total of \$1,428 monthly.

In 2011, the income limit for SSI (taking into account a \$20 general income disregard) is \$694 for an individual (\$1,011 for a couple). Thus, Mrs. Gherkin’s income is over twice the applicable SSI income limit of \$694, which her state has made the Medicaid limit for the aged, blind or disabled.

You screen Mrs. Gherkin for Pickle eligibility as outlined above. Determining that the last month in which she received both Social Security and SSI was March 1978, you look up that time period in the following table and find the corresponding reduction factor (.282). You multiply Mrs. Gherkin’s current Social Security benefit of \$1,175 by that factor, to determine her current countable “Pickle” income.

$\$1,175 \text{ multiplied by } .282 = \331 (“Pickled” Social Security income, rounded downward)

$\$331 \text{ countable Social Security income} + \$253 \text{ private pension} = \$584 \text{ total countable “Pickle” income.}$

Since \$584 is less than the current individual SSI income limit (including the standard \$20 disregard) of \$694, Mrs. Gherkin is eligible for Medicaid, even though she is ineligible for SSI.

Reduction Factors for Calculating Medicaid Eligibility Under the Pickle Amendment During 2011

If the last month in which a person received SSI while, or immediately prior to, receiving Social Security was in any of the periods below, multiply the present amount of her Social Security by the corresponding factor.

<i>If SSI was terminated during this period:</i>	<i>Multiply 2011 Social Security income by:²</i>	<i>If SS was terminated during this period:</i>	<i>Multiply 2011 Social Security income by:</i>	<i>If SSI was terminated during this period:</i>	<i>Multiply 2011 Social Security income by:</i>
May – June 1977	.267	Jan. 1988 – Dec. 1988	.526	Jan. 1999 – Dec. 1999	.742
July 1977 – June 1978	.282	Jan. 1989 – Dec. 1989	.547	Jan. 2000 – Dec. 2000	.761
July 1978 – June 1979	.301	Jan. 1990 – Dec. 1990	.573	Jan. 2001 – Dec. 2001	.788
July 1979 – June 1980	.330	Jan. 1991 – Dec. 1991	.604	Jan. 2002 – Dec. 2002	.808
July 1980 – June 1981	.378	Jan. 1992 – Dec. 1992	.626	Jan. 2003 – Dec. 2003	.819
July 1981 – June 1982	.420	Jan. 1993 – Dec. 1993	.645	Jan. 2004 – Dec. 2004	.837
July 1982 – Dec. 1983	.451	Jan. 1994 – Dec. 1994	.661	Jan. 2005 – Dec. 2005	.859
Jan. 1984 – Dec. 1984	.467	Jan. 1995 – Dec. 1995	.680	Jan. 2006 – Dec. 2006	.894
Jan. 1985 – Dec. 1985	.483	Jan. 1996 – Dec. 1996	.698	Jan. 2007 – Dec. 2007	.924
Jan. 1986 – Dec. 1986	.498	Jan. 1997 – Dec. 1997	.718	Jan. 2008 – Dec. 2008	.944
Jan. 1987 – Dec. 1987	.505	Jan. 1998 – Dec. 1998	.733	Jan. 2009 – Dec. 2010	1.0 ³

¹ The person need not literally receive both SSI and Social Security checks in the same month, but need only be *entitled* to both for the same month. There is a one-month lag in OASDI payments, which are not disbursed until the month after entitlement, while SSI payments are paid in the month of entitlement. It is common for a person to receive SSI while awaiting receipt of OASDI payments. Once her monthly OASDI begins, if it exceeds the SSI rate, she receives just OASDI thereafter. In such circumstances, even though the person never actually received simultaneous payments from both programs in a single month, she meets the first Pickle requirement. This is true even if income from a retroactive OASDI payment exceeds the SSI benefit level for all months in which SSI was received. For this reason, you should ask not just if the person received both SSI and Social Security in the same month, but did he receive SSI immediately before his Social Security payments began. See 42 C.F.R. §435.135 and 51 Fed. Reg. 12326 (April 10, 1986). For more information, see “Medicaid Eligibility in a Time Warp”, 22 *Clearinghouse Review* 120 (June 1988).

² Due to Social Security’s rounding rules, the adjustment factors in the table produce an approximate, rather than exact, figure. Because a discrepancy of one cent may mean the difference between Medicaid eligibility as a Pickle case and no meaningful access to health care, advocates should obtain exact information from the Social Security Administration if the figure produced by the screening method results in a determination that the client is over the eligibility limit by a small amount (i.e., \$20 or less).

³ Due to the recession, the cost of living has remained flat since 2008, and therefore there was no Social Security COLA in 2009 or 2010. Individuals who have lost their SSI since December 2008 do not benefit from the Pickle Amendment, but those who lost coverage before then can still reduce countable income by the amounts shown in the table.