



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

ROY COOPER • Governor

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JOYCE MASSEY-SMITH • Director
Division of Aging and Adult Services

December 14, 2023

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ATTENTION: SPECIAL ASSISTANCE AND ADULT SERVICES SUPERVISORS, PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS

SUBJECT: Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) 2024 and Veteran Affairs (VA) Compensation and Benefits COLA 2024 for Special Assistance (SA) and Special Assistance In Home (SAIH)

REQUIRED ACTION: Information Only Time Sensitive Immediate

Effective January 1, 2024, Special Assistance beneficiaries will receive a 3.2% cost-of-living increase in their RSDI/SSI/VA benefits. They will also receive an SA Rate increase (see below).

- Effective January 1, 2024, the monthly **Basic Rate** for Special Assistance shall be \$1,326.00, and the SA Basic Maintenance Amount shall be \$1,396.00.
- Effective January 1, 2024, the monthly **Enhanced Rate** for Special Assistance shall be \$1,700.00, and the SA Enhanced Maintenance Amount shall be \$1,770.00.

Reminder: Both SA and SAIH COLAs will take place at the same time. Please stay apprised of all updates provided by NC FAST regarding COLA processing.

This letter outlines the SA COLA automated process to be executed by NC FAST and provides counties procedures for handling SA COLA mass change updates.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND VETERAN'S CHANGES DUE TO COLA ADJUSTMENT

1. RSDI/SSI - Effective January 1, 2024, recipients of RSDI and/or SSI will receive a 3.2% COLA increase in their monthly benefits.
2. SSI Federal Benefit Rate (FBR) - Effective January 1, 2024, the SSI FBR for an individual has increased to \$943.00 per month.
3. VA Compensation and Benefits – Effective January 1, 2024, most recipients of VA compensation and benefits will receive a 3.2% COLA increase in their monthly benefit.

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF AGING AND ADULT SERVICES

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

SA MASS CHANGE AUTOMATED OVERVIEW

1. NC FAST will create new RSDI/SSI/VA evidence with the start date of January 1, 2024, and update Special Assistance cases to adjust the payment effective January 1, 2024. This will terminate any cases that exceed the income limit effective December 31, 2023. NC FAST recalculates the SA payment by increasing the Social Security payment, SSI payment and/or VA payment amount by 3.2%. The cents are dropped from Social Security, SSI, and VA payments.
2. NC FAST will automatically accept the changed decision for all cases except cases in an "On Hold" status. These exception cases will require the caseworker to review and manually accept the changed decision. Timely notices have been system generated on updated SA cases, including exception cases. Required COLA mass change reports will be provided to the counties.
 - **SA Exception/On Hold Cases:** NC FAST will provide a report that identifies the SA On Hold cases that have potentially been impacted by COLA, but previous changed decisions remain in 'On-Hold' status. Caseworkers will need to use this report to review the 'On-Hold' changed decision, take appropriate action, and send a manual Adequate DSS-8110 with the new payment amount. *NCF-20031 SA and SA COLA Mass Change Timely Notices* have been sent on these cases. The NCF-20031 notice meets federal requirements for a mass change.
 - **SA Ineligible Cases:** NC FAST will provide a report that identifies any SA cases that are potentially terminating due to the COLA increase reassessment and have an 'On-Hold' status. Caseworkers will need to use this report to review the "Ineligible" changed decision and handle decision if needed. Send a manual Adequate DSS-8110 to terminate the case when appropriate. *NCF-20031 SA COLA Mass Change Timely Notices* have been sent on these cases. The NCF-20031 notice meets federal requirements for a mass change.
 - **SA Processed Cases:** NC FAST will provide a report that identifies the SA Cases where COLA was the only change. NC FAST will automatically accept the changed decision and automatically generate an Adequate DSS-8110 for cases with a payment amount change. No caseworker action is required. *NCF-20031 SA COLA Mass Change Timely Notices* have been sent on these cases. The NCF-20031 notice meets federal requirements for a mass change.
3. NC FAST will provide a list of Notices and Reports generated, as well as Report instructions. Caseworkers should review the Reports and take appropriate action on these cases. Reports will be posted on the FAST Help Home page and use the standard NC FAST reports password.

SA PENDING APPLICATIONS

Pending applications will not be automatically updated by NC FAST. All pending applications will require 2024 RSDI/SSI/VA benefit evidence to be entered with a start date of January 1, 2024. The 2023 RSDI/SSI/VA benefit evidence for any applicable 2023 approval period will also need to be entered into NC FAST in the 'last year's benefit amount' field to ensure computation of the SA benefit is determined correctly.

ROUNDING CORRECTIONS

1. NC FAST drops cents for Social Security, SSI, and VA benefits when executing the automated COLA updates for the mass change. Should an amount be incorrect due to dropping cents for cases automatically updated by NC FAST, it is not necessary to manually correct the amounts

immediately following the mass change. Take action to correct Social Security, SSI and VA payment amounts at the next redetermination or change of circumstance, whichever occurs first, by entering the increased benefit amount on NC FAST Benefit/Income evidence. The start date for corrected evidence is January 1, 2024.

2. When the above rounding corrections are made *at the next change in circumstance* and the corrected benefit amount results in a SA-IH payment decrease, send a new timely DSS-8110 indicating the new SA payment.

When the above rounding corrections are made *at the next redetermination* and the corrected benefit amount results in a SA payment decrease, send a new DSS-8110 indicating the new SA payment. *Determine if the new DSS-8110 is to be timely or adequate based on the below:*

- o At the last application approval or recertification, if the beneficiary was sent an approval notice that indicated the approval was for a specific certification period, then an *adequate* DSS-8110 may now be sent. (Policy reference: SA-3330 II. C. 1. g.)
- o At the last application approval or recertification, if the beneficiary was *not* sent an approval notice that indicated the approval was for a specific certification period, then a *timely* DSS-8110 must now be sent.

Correcting Benefit/Income Evidence to the increased Social Security, SSI, or VA benefit amount will create an overpayment in NC FAST. The overpayment created when adding the corrected Benefit/Income Evidence at the next redetermination or change of circumstance, whichever occurs first, is a State responsible overpayment and charged to the State.

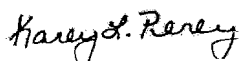
Failure to add corrected Benefit/Income Evidence at the next redetermination or change of circumstance, whichever occurs first, will result in a county responsible overpayment as of the new certification period or when the change in circumstances took place.

3. SA cases not automatically updated by the NC FAST Mass Change (Exception Cases requiring caseworker manual update and review) should be completed prior to the December 2023 NC FAST processing deadline.

NC FAST will provide guidance and reports related to SA COLA automation soon. All guidance must be followed timely and accurately to ensure appropriate actions are taken.

For any questions regarding this letter, please contact the Special Assistance listserv at specialassistance@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,



Karey Perez,
Adult Services Section Chief
Division of Aging and Adult Services

KP/tg/wb

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