

# Issue BRIEF

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## TRANSITION CONSIDERATIONS FOR SSI RECIPIENTS

Receipt of SSI benefits can affect youth recipients' transition to adulthood, especially in terms of employment. Three factors can come into play:

1. The strict medical, income, and asset criteria for SSI eligibility
2. The demographic, family, health, and housing characteristics of youth SSI recipients, which indicate a need for a variety of supports
3. The substantial variation in SSI participation and service availability across states, which means that any interventions might need to be adjusted in accordance with geography

## The Transition to Employment: Better Data Needed to Identify Best Practices for Youth SSI Recipients

The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, along with many other stakeholders, is working to improve outcomes for youth ages 14 to 24 who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Mathematica Policy Research is contributing to this effort in two ways, as part of its work for the SSI Youth Recipient and Employment Transition Formative Research project. First, we are identifying potential programs and policies for youth SSI recipients, including research questions for further follow-up. Second, we are uncovering testable interventions for helping these youth make the transition to sustained, gainful employment. This brief discusses transition frameworks designed to guide intervention development and assessment, evidence on potential interventions, and federal and state programs that youth might access.

### FRAMEWORKS TO GUIDE INTERVENTION DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT

Two transition frameworks document best practices for the employment of youth with disabilities. These frameworks can inform efforts to help youth SSI recipients specifically.

#### Guideposts for Success

*Developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth*

#### Effective Transition Practices and Predictors Matrix

*Maintained by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition*

Both frameworks summarize evidence that can help guide the services offered by practitioners—such as staff from local education agencies, vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, or community rehabilitation providers—as well as the services that youth and families choose. But three aspects of these frameworks limit their potential to help youth SSI recipients:

1. Many of the strategies, particularly in Guideposts for Success, are supported only by descriptive evidence.
2. The majority of evidence reflects the experiences of varied groups of youth with disabilities, whose circumstances might not match those of youth SSI recipients.
3. The frameworks do not provide much guidance on benefits counseling or financial education.

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## EVIDENCE ON POTENTIAL INTERVENTIONS

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Mathematica used two sources to identify interventions that could help youth SSI recipients with employment:

(1) two major demonstration projects by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that target these youth exclusively and (2) a larger base of studies in which youth SSI recipients may be part of a bigger population.

### Our review of interventions revealed three key findings:

1. The evaluation of the Youth Transition Demonstration provides the most comprehensive information about a package of strategies to improve the employment outcomes of youth SSI recipients.
2. Random assignment evaluations of federal demonstrations for people who receive adult SSI and Social Security Disability Insurance show the positive impacts of case management, health plans, supported employment, work incentives, and other supports.
3. Various interventions targeted to youth and young adults with disabilities show consistent promising evidence on employment outcomes. But much of this evidence is based on descriptive or non-experimental studies, and many interventions involve transition programs that offer employment services coupled with other services.

## FEDERAL AND STATE PROGRAMS THAT COULD HELP

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Youth SSI recipients interact with many federal and state programs for support, including SSA, state VR agencies, and workforce development agencies. Changing some of the rules of these programs—to improve collaboration or add services, for example—could help youth SSI recipients find and keep jobs. Increasing this group's access to services from the state VR agency or workforce development agency could also be beneficial. In addition, systems-change efforts could improve the service environment for these youth.

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

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The lack of strong evidence on effective practices for youth with disabilities generally—and for youth SSI recipients specifically—underscores the need for better data. Transition frameworks such as the Guideposts for Success can be used as a starting point to assess interventions for helping these youth, using evidence from the field. But these frameworks alone might not be enough to produce positive outcomes for youth SSI recipients.

There is no single way to identify the most promising of the reviewed interventions specifically for youth SSI recipients, in part because the tests conducted thus far for this group have been limited. Building the evidence for these youth could involve anything from small pilot tests to large demonstration projects. But in any case, finding and deploying the most promising interventions could make an important difference in how youth SSI recipients transition from school to work.

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