

We're still waiting for photos for the promised story about a recent SDMA signing, but we have some good news to share about an excellent and timely resource we've received from our friends at ASAN (the Autistic Self Advocacy Network).

ASAN often creates Plain Language versions (which they call "Explainers") of information on issues of importance to members of our community. Right now, there's nothing more timely than the government shutdown and its possible effects on people with I/DD and their families. The explainer is, we think, equally useful for neurodiverse and neurotypical citizens, and we are grateful for the ability to share it.

Here is [the link](#), and, for your convenience, we reproduce the whole explainer below.



Right now, the U.S. government is shut down. The government shutdown affects many important things in the U.S. It affects things like government programs, and workers in government offices. In this explainer, we will talk about what a shutdown is. We will also talk about what things in the U.S. changed or will change from the shutdown.

What does it mean that the government is shut down?

The law says that every year, the government needs to pass a new budget. If a new budget doesn't get passed, the government isn't allowed to do most of its work. A government shutdown happens when Congress can't agree on a new budget. The government stops working until Congress agrees on a new budget.

For example: The National Park Service stopped picking up trash in parks during the last shutdown. Some of the National Parks had to close. The Smithsonian museums and National Zoo also closed.

Some U.S. government workers get “furloughed” during a shutdown. Being furloughed means that they don’t get paid. It means they cannot work.

How long will the shutdown last?

There is no way to know how long a government shutdown will last. Ending the shutdown depends on Congress. They need to agree to pass a new budget.

The last government shutdown lasted 35 days in 2019. This was the longest government shutdown.

Most government agencies have enough money to last until November. If the shutdown lasts longer, then some benefit programs might run out of money.

What does the shutdown mean for the benefits I use? What benefits could get cut during the shutdown?

In this section, we will talk about different kinds of benefit programs. We will talk about how the government shutdown might affect each program.

Healthcare

The government shutdown won’t stop people from getting Medicaid and Medicare. That’s because the law says these programs must run even during a shutdown. But the shutdown could still make it harder for people to get their benefits. This is because the government staff who run Medicaid and Medicare could get furloughed.

The government has enough money to keep Medicaid running until March 31st, 2026. If the shutdown lasts longer than that, it could affect people’s benefits. Home and community-based services (HCBS) are also part of Medicaid. If the shutdown keeps going past March, it could affect people who get HCBS.

Medicare will not run out of money because of the shutdown. This is because the money for Medicare is separate from the government’s regular budget. But the shutdown would make it harder for the government to run Medicare services. Many government staff that help run Medicare services were furloughed.

Government staff won't be able to help new people get Medicare, answer questions, fix problems, or even keep their offices open.

You can learn about the difference between Medicaid and Medicare from ASAN's toolkit, "[A Self-Advocate's Guide to the Affordable Care Act](#)".

SSI/SSDI

SSI and SSDI are important programs for people with disabilities. SSI is sometimes called Social Security. SSDI is sometimes called Disability.

SSI/SSDI will not run out of money because of the shutdown. This is because the money for SSI/SSDI is separate from the government's regular budget. But the shutdown would make it harder for the government to run SSI/SSDI. Many government staff that help run SSI/SSDI were furloughed. That means there are not enough staff to help people who get SSI/SSDI. Government staff won't be able to help new people get benefits, answer questions, fix problems, or even keep their offices open.

SNAP (food stamps)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the government agency that runs SNAP. The USDA said they don't have enough money to pay for all of SNAP in November. People who get SNAP probably won't get their full benefits after November if the shutdown keeps going. That means people will have a harder time getting the food they need.

Housing programs

Housing programs will keep getting money from the U.S. government until November. Housing programs have some money saved in case of emergencies like this. That means housing programs can keep running even after November if the shutdown keeps going. But that extra money could run out. That means people in housing programs might not know when their program will run out of money. They might not get the help they need to keep their housing after November.

The part of the U.S. government that runs housing programs is called the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The part of HUD that makes sure fair housing laws are followed is called the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO). FHEO helps people get their housing rights if they get treated unfairly because of:

- Their race
- Their sex or gender
- Their disability
- Their religion
- Whether or not they are married
- What country they are from

But during the government shutdown, the FHEO also shuts down. That means if someone gets treated unfairly in a housing program, there is no government office that can help them.

Unemployment Benefits

Unemployment benefits is money the government gives to people who lost their job. This money helps people get what they need while looking for a new job. People who get unemployment benefits will still get these benefits during the shutdown. That is because the states pay for unemployment benefits.

But the U.S. government pays for each state's unemployment agency. These state agencies give out unemployment money and do customer service. Many states have enough money from the U.S. government to keep their state agencies open in 2025. But if the shutdown keeps going into 2026, state unemployment agencies might work more slowly. That may make it harder to get help with unemployment benefits in 2026.

What disability government agencies will lose their money because of the shutdown?

Protection and Advocacy organizations are groups that protect the legal rights of people with disabilities. They are called P&As for short. Every state has a P&A.

Many P&As get most of their money from the government. That means P&As might not be able to help as many people during the shutdown. Some P&As have money saved for an emergency like this. But it depends on the state. You can contact your state P&A to find out what they can do during the shutdown.

Centers for Independent Living are groups that help people with disabilities live on their own. They get called CILs for short. The government shutdown made it so CILs don't get some of the money they need. This means CILs won't be able to help as many people.

Most CILs got some money from the U.S. government right before the shutdown happened. That money will make it more likely CILs will stay open and can help some people. But that money might not be enough. Many CILs might need their state government to pay to stop CILs from closing.

What happens to government workers during the shutdown?

You might have heard government workers being called “essential” and “non-essential”. Essential means that the government needs a worker to work even during a shutdown. Their job might be something that keeps people safe, like an air traffic controller. Non-essential means that the government does not need a worker to work during a shutdown. An example of non-essential workers are people who work at National Parks.

There are 2 kinds of essential workers:

- Expected workers, who don’t get paid during the shutdown. They will get paid for their work after the shutdown. But they are still expected to work during the shutdown. Air traffic controllers are one example of expected workers.
- Exempt workers, who still get paid during shutdowns. These workers get paid from places besides the government budget. For example, government researchers who already got money for their projects will keep doing their work during the shutdown.

Most government workers are non-essential workers. That means most of them get furloughed. But they still get paid after the shutdown ends. The law says that all government workers, furloughed or not, must get paid after the shutdown ends.

How is this government shutdown different from other shutdowns?

The White House is using the government shutdown to try and break the law. The White House has started firing government workers instead of furloughing them. Government workers are not supposed to be fired during a shutdown. The White House does not get any new power to fire people during a shutdown.

It also takes work to fire people. Government workers have to come into work to fire people. The workers that fire people during a shutdown aren’t supposed to be working. That means that all the firings could be against the law.

The Office of Management and Budget is the government agency in charge of paying back government workers after a shutdown. But they said they might not pay back government workers when the shutdown ends. This is against the law.

The White House may also be using the shutdown as an excuse to stop certain people from getting their rights protected. When the government shuts down, the courts also shut down. That means civil rights lawsuits will be cancelled or happen late. People in our community will have a harder time protecting their rights.

One group the courts closing will affect is immigrants. Immigrants need to go through court cases to get the right to stay in the U.S. It can take years to get into court, even without the shutdown. The shutdown will keep even more immigrants from protecting their rights.

Where can I get help during the shutdown?

If your landlord tries to raise your rent or evict you during the government shutdown:

- Contact a lawyer as soon as possible. You can find free legal help through www.lsc.gov or at www.LawHelp.org. When meeting with a lawyer, bring your lease. Also bring any notices your landlord and/or management company gave you.

For government workers, the [Partnership for Public Service](#) has resources for the shutdown.

If you are a disabled person who needs legal help, contact your state P&A. Even during the shutdown, they still might be able to help. They can also give you other resources that might help.

[Feeding America](#) has resources about food assistance programs and ways to find help.

[THRIVE has a list of groups that give mental health services](#). They have resources like crisis phone numbers, helplines, and peer support groups.

[The National Down Syndrome Congress \(NDSC\)](#) has a resource explaining what's happening with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[The American Association of People with Disabilities \(AAPD\)](#) has a resource that explains about the government shutdown.

