



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**

**ROY COOPER** • Governor

**MANDY COHEN, MD, MPH** • Secretary

**JOYCE MASSEY-SMITH, MPA**  
Director, Division of Aging and Adult Services

**March 5, 2021**

**DEAR COUNTY DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**ATTENTION:** SPECIAL ASSISTANCE AND ADULT SERVICES SUPERVISORS, PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS, AND PROGRAM MANAGERS

**SUBJECT:** Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) 2021 and Veteran Affairs (VA) Compensation and Benefits COLA 2021 for Special Assistance-In Home (SA-IH)

**REQUIRED ACTION:**  Information Only  Time Sensitive  Immediate

Effective January 1, 2021, Special Assistance beneficiaries received a 1.3% cost-of-living increase in their RSDI/SSI/VA benefits. Special Assistance-In Home (SA-IH) cases were exempt from counting the COLA increase until April 2021, after the new Federal Poverty Levels are published.

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

**SOCIAL SECURITY AND VETERAN'S CHANGES DUE TO COLA ADJUSTMENT**

1. RSDI/SSI- Effective January 1, 2021, recipients of RSDI and/or SSI received a 1.3% COLA increase in their monthly benefits.
2. SSI Federal Benefit Rate (FBR)- Effective January 1, 2021, the SSI FBR for an individual has increased to \$794.00 per month.
3. VA Compensation and Benefits – Effective January 1, 2021, most recipients of VA compensation and benefits received a 1.3% COLA increase in their monthly benefit.

**SA-IH PENDING APPLICATIONS**

Pending applications will not be automatically updated by NC FAST. All pending applications will require the RSDI/SSI/VA benefit amount to be entered with a start date of January 1, 2021. Also enter the 2020 RSDI/SSI/VA benefit amount in the 'last year's benefit amount' field so that NC FAST will compute the benefit 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

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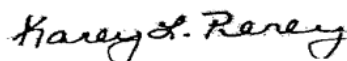
cases automatically updated by NC FAST, it is not necessary to manually correct the amounts immediately following the mass change. Take action to correct Social Security, SSI and VA payment amounts at the next redetermination or change of circumstance, whichever occurs first, by entering the increased benefit amount on Benefit/Income evidence in NC FAST. The start date for the corrected evidence is January 1, 2021.

2. When corrections are needed at the next change of circumstance and the corrected benefit amount results in a SA payment decrease, send a new timely DSS-8110 indicating the new SA payment. When corrections are needed at the next recertification and the corrected benefit amount results in a SA payment decrease, send a new adequate DSS-8110 indicating the new SA payment. Correcting the 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 timely, (the first time the case is touched after the NC FAST COLA 2021 COLA mass change), is a state responsible overpayment and charged to the state.
3. SA cases not automatically updated by the NC FAST Mass Change (Exception Cases) and require county caseworker manual updating and review, should be completed prior to the April 2021 NC FAST processing deadline to avoid county responsible overpayment(s) that require recoupment.
4. Due to the 'rounding cents' process in NC FAST, a large number of cases resulted in an 'ineligible' decision that was automatically accepted for cases that fell below the FBR due to rounding down total countable benefits to \$793 rather than \$794. COLA reports will be available on FAST Help under: Reports > Mass Change > RSDI/SSI/VA COLA Reports > April 2021. Caseworkers must work SA-IH reports prior to the SA-IH COLA run to ensure that cases do not terminate in error.

NC FAST will provide notification, further guidance, and reports related to COLA automation. All communication guidance and instructions must be followed timely and accurately to ensure appropriate actions are taken to avoid potential overpayments.

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact the Special Assistance listserv at [specialassistance@dhhs.nc.gov](mailto:specialassistance@dhhs.nc.gov).

Sincerely,



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

KP/ctw

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