



MEPD and TW Bulletin 25-24

Date: Dec. 29, 2025

To: State and Regional Operations Supervisors and Staff
Program Managers
Regional Directors
Policy Attorneys
Hearings Officers

From: Access and Eligibility Services Program Policy
State Office 2106

Subject: Federal Benefits 2026 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)

The information in this bulletin will be included in a future handbook revision. Until the handbook is updated, staff must use the information in this bulletin. If you have any questions regarding the policy information in this bulletin, follow regional procedures.

Active bulletins are posted on the following websites:

- [Medicaid for the Elderly and People with Disabilities Handbook \(MEPDH\)](https://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/mepd/policy-bulletins) at <https://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/mepd/policy-bulletins>;
- [Texas Works Handbook \(TWH\)](https://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/texas-works-handbook/texas-works-bulletins) at <https://hhs.texas.gov/laws-regulations/handbooks/texas-works-handbook/texas-works-bulletins>.

Federal Benefits 2026 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA)

Background

The Social Security Administration (SSA) adjusts Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI) benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits to reflect the annual cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) effective Jan. 1 of each year. The COLA adjustment also impacts Railroad Retirement (RR) benefits. The annual COLA is based on increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The COLA increase for 2026 is 2.8%.

Policy Update

[Income Limits](#)

MEPD

The income limits for the institutional, Community Attendant Services (CAS), Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waiver, and Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) programs are 300% of the SSI federal benefit rate and are adjusted annually. Effective Jan. 1, 2026, the income limits are:

- Individual: \$2,982
- Couple: \$5,964

Medicare Savings Program (MSP)

The MSP income limits are adjusted annually based on the federal poverty level (FPL). There are no changes to the Qualified Medicare Beneficiaries (QMB), Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiaries (SLMB), and Qualifying Individuals (QI-1) income limits until the new FPL amounts are published in early 2026.

[Resource Limits](#)

MEPD

The 2026 resource limits for the MEPD programs listed above will remain the same:

- Individual: \$2,000
- Couple: \$3,000

MSP

The MSP resource limits are adjusted annually based on changes in the CPI. Effective Jan. 1, 2026, the resource limits for QMB, SLMB, and QI-1 are:

- Individual: \$9,950
- Couple: \$14,910

The resource limits for the Qualified Disabled and Working Individuals (QDWI) Program are twice the countable resources allowed under the SSI program and will remain the same:

- Individual: \$4,000
- Couple: \$6,000

Federal Benefit Increases

MEPD

Income limits based on the SSI Federal Benefit Rate for the 2026 levels are:

- Individual: \$994
- Couple: \$1,491

All Programs

RSDI and SSI beneficiaries will receive a 2.8% COLA effective Jan. 1, 2026.

Effective Jan. 1, 2026, the maximum SSI standard payment amount is:

- Individual: \$994
- Couple: \$1,491

RR beneficiaries will receive a 2.8% COLA in Tier I benefits and a 0.9% COLA in Tier II benefits for 2026.

The following federal benefits are not included in the Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System (TIERS) Mass Update but will receive a COLA effective Jan. 1, 2026:

- Civil Service annuitants will receive a 2.8% increase in benefits for 2026; and
- Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) beneficiaries will receive a 2.8% COLA increase for 2026.

Notes: Under federal law, the VA's compensation, pension, "new law" pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits for surviving dependents of deceased veterans will receive the same percentage increase as Social Security benefits.

Institutionalized VA beneficiaries whose benefits are capped at \$90 do not receive an increase.

Medicare Part A

All Programs

The standard Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) premium for beneficiaries not entitled to free Medicare Part A coverage will increase to \$565 for 2026. The reduced Medicare Part A premium amount will increase to \$311 for 2026.

The annual Medicare Part A deductible for hospitalized beneficiaries will increase to \$1,736 for 2026.

Medicare Part B

All Programs

The standard Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance) premium will increase to \$202.90 for 2026. A Medicare beneficiary's Part B monthly premium is based on their gross income. Staff must verify the exact amount using State Online Query (SOLQ).

The monthly premium for Medicare Part B coverage of immunosuppressive drugs for kidney transplant recipients is \$121.60 for 2026.

The annual Medicare Part B deductible will increase to \$283 in 2026.

Student Earned Income Exclusion (SEIE)

MEPD

The monthly amount of earned income that can be excluded under the SEIE will increase to \$2,410 for 2026. The yearly amount that can be excluded under the SEIE will increase to \$9,730 for 2026.

Substantial Home Equity

MEPD

The maximum home equity amount will increase to \$752,000 for 2026.

Spousal Standards

MEPD

The minimum spousal protected resource amount (SPRA) will increase to \$32,532 for 2026.

The maximum SPRA will increase to \$162,660 for 2026.

The maximum monthly maintenance needs allowance (MMMNA) for spousal cases will increase to \$4,066.50 for 2026.

Appeal Procedures

[All Programs](#)

Recipients may appeal any adverse action resulting from the COLA update. Staff may continue benefits or continue benefits at the previous levels, if applicable, only if all of the following conditions are met:

- the appeal is based on incorrect computation of eligibility or benefits or misapplication of federal policy;
- the appeal is requested within 13 days of the date of the adverse action notice; and
- the person does not waive the right to continued benefits.

Remind TANF and SNAP recipients that an overpayment subject to recoupment will occur if the:

- benefits are continued at the previous level; and
- the hearing officer's decision is not in the recipient's favor.

Automation

[Mass Update of TIERS Data](#)

TIERS updates ran on Dec. 6, 2025. TIERS will update the income and expenses for all recipients who have RSDI, SSI, and RR income or a Medicare premium expense, including eligibility determination groups (EDGs) and cases that are denied or no longer active.

The income and expense pages will reflect the updated information, including the effective begin dates, income amounts, Medicare Part B premium amount and co-pay budget information. TIERS will generate exception reports for staff action on EDGs and cases that cannot be updated and will require manual action.

In addition, TIERS Mass Update will run eligibility, dispose the EDGs in the case and send case-specific correspondence on active cases and EDGs in Ongoing case mode.

In the following situations, TIERS will update the data but will not run eligibility:

- case is not in Ongoing mode;
- case contains an EDG with ongoing benefits that were overridden; or
- case contains a denied EDG.

TIERS generates a Mass Update Exception Report for cases in which the COLA update cannot be completed because the case was not in Ongoing mode or the case had an EDG with overridden benefits. Staff must take the appropriate action to

verify and correct the recipient's income and premium amounts and run eligibility for all cases that appear on the exception report according to the policy for each type of program assistance.

Verification Sources

The following verification sources are used to update the income amounts and Medicare Part B premiums:

- "Percentage Increase Used" when TIERS calculates the new RSDI, SSI or RR benefit amount using the percentage calculation;
- "SDX" when TIERS updates the new RSDI, SSI or RR benefit amount from the State Data Exchange (SDX) interface file;
- "BENDEX" when RSDI income amounts are updated from the annual Beneficiary Data Exchange (BENDEX) interface file;
- "SMIB" when Medicare Part B premium amounts are updated based on the Supplemental Medical Insurance Benefits (SMIB) interface file; and
- "COLA Update" when the Medicare Part B premium amount is updated, and the recipient is not on the SMIB or BENDEX interface files.

A report (Excel spreadsheet) of all MEPD cases with a decrease in co-payment as a result of the COLA update will be created. Staff must take the appropriate action to verify and correct the recipient's income and premium amounts to ensure the co-payment calculation is accurate.

Reports

TIERS generates interface exception reports for cases that were not processed in the interface update for the reasons below. Automation staff forward the interface exception reports to Eligibility Operations. The interface exception reports contain specific instructions for the actions required by staff. Staff must take the appropriate action to verify and correct income and premium amounts for all EDGs for cases that appear on the exception reports according to policy for each type of assistance.

Interface Exception Reports scenarios and associated actions include:

- TIERS or the interface file has multiple Social Security Claim Numbers (SSCNs); however, all the SSCNs do not match and the RSDI income records were not updated. Verify the RSDI amount for all SSCNs for the person and correct the income amounts and SSCNs as needed.
- The RSDI income records were not updated because the person is receiving RSDI on four or more SSCNs. Verify the RSDI amount for all SSCNs and correct income amounts and SSCNs as needed.

- The Medicare Part B premium does not equal the amount of \$202.90 Medicare Part B premium. Mass Update was not performed on this case. Review the case and update the premium.
- According to interface data, the Medicare Part B premium is paid by the State of Texas, but TIERS does not reflect this information. Review the case, update data collection and run eligibility.
- According to TIERS data, the Medicare Part B premium is paid by the State of Texas, but the SMIB file does not reflect this information. Review the case, update data collection and run eligibility.
- TIERS has multiple RSDI income records for a person with different SSCNs, and the person also receives SSI. The records were not updated because the combined RSDI and SSI amount could not be determined. Verify the RSDI and SSI amounts for the person.
- TIERS indicates the person is receiving RSDI and SSI. Based on BENDEX, the person's combined RSDI and SSI is over the SSI income limit. The RSDI income amount was updated based on BENDEX and the SSI amount was updated to the difference between the combined amount and the RSDI amount. Verify the RSDI and SSI amounts for the person and take appropriate action.
- TIERS indicates the person is receiving RSDI and SSI, and the person's combined RSDI and SSI is over the individual SSI income limit. Only the SSI income amount was updated using the percentage increase. Verify the RSDI and SSI amounts for the person and take appropriate action.

Correspondence

On Dec. 6, 2025, TIERS generates a Form TF0001, Notice of Case Action, if benefits are increased, decreased or denied. The COLA TF0001 contains the following messages based on the type of assistance impacted:

[SNAP](#)

English

"The amount of state benefits you get has changed. This is due to either a change in (1) the amount of money you get in federal benefits (RSDI, SSI, or Railroad Retirement), or (2) the amount you pay for Medicare Part B."

Spanish

"La cantidad de beneficios que usted recibe se ha modificado. Ello se debe a que uno de los datos siguientes ha sufrido un cambio: (1) la cantidad de dinero que usted recibe a través de beneficios federales (RSDI, SSI o pensión de ferrocarril), o (2) la cantidad que paga por Medicare Parte B."

TANF

English

"The amount of benefits you get has changed. This is due to the change in the amount of money you get in federal benefits (RSDI, SSI, or Railroad Retirement)."

Spanish

"La cantidad de beneficios que usted recibe se ha modificado. Ello se debe a que la cantidad de dinero que usted recibe a través de beneficios federales (RSDI, SSI o pensión de ferrocarril) ha sufrido un cambio."

All Medical Programs

English

"Your benefits are denied. This is due to the changes in the amount of money you get in federal benefits (RSDI, SSI or Railroad Retirement)."

Spanish

"Se rechaza la prestación de beneficios. Ello se debe a que la cantidad de dinero que usted recibe a través de beneficios federales (RSDI, SSI o pensión de ferrocarril) ha sufrido un cambio."

Co-Payment Changes for Types of Assistance TA 10, TA 12, TP 10, TP 15, TP 16, or TP 17

English

"The amount you need to pay each month has changed. This is due to either a change in (1) the amount of money you get in federal benefits (RSDI, SSI or Railroad Retirement) or (2) the amount you pay for Medicare Part B."

Spanish

"La cantidad que usted tiene que pagar cada mes se ha modificado. Ello se debe a que uno de los datos siguientes ha sufrido un cambio: (1) la cantidad de dinero que usted recibe a través de beneficios federales (RSDI, SSI o pensión de ferrocarril), o (2) la cantidad que paga por Medicare Parte B."

These messages appear in correspondence triggered by either Mass Update or first EDG disposition after the COLA update.

Handbook

The MEPDH is currently scheduled to be updated in the March 2026 revision.

Impacted MEPD appendices are scheduled to be updated on the LOOP by Dec. 31, 2025.

Updates to the TWH are not required.

Training

MEPD New Hire Training and TIERS training will be updated.

Effective Date

These COLA updates are effective Jan. 1, 2026.