



## Incorporating Savings Options for People with Disabilities into Financial Empowerment Programs

Financial empowerment programs, including those that provide financial coaching/counseling services, report common indicators that include participants' abilities to increase savings. However, programs may not be familiar with asset limits recipients of public benefits may face and savings options for people with disabilities that allow qualified individuals to save while also maintaining eligibility for public benefit programs.



In 2014, the Stephen Beck Jr., Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, or better known as the ABLÉ Act, was passed. ABLÉ accounts are tax-advantaged savings accounts for individuals with disabilities. Eligible individuals may establish an ABLÉ savings account and save up to \$15,000 per year (2019). In addition to the individual contributing to an ABLÉ account, family members, friends, employers or even a Special Needs Trust can make direct contributions into an ABLÉ account.

The savings are protected and **will not affect eligibility** for most federally-funded means-tested benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs, Medicaid and Food Stamps (SNAP).

ABLÉ account owners who work may contribute even more if they or their employer has not contributed to an employer-sponsored retirement account that calendar year. From their earnings, an ABLÉ account owner may contribute up to \$12,140 more in tax year 2019.\* This is part of the "ABLÉ to Work" provision of the "Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017" which effectively increased the total annual allowable savings for 2019 to \$27,140. Savings grow tax-free within the investment options available through ABLÉ. An eligible individual must meet certain qualifications to open an ABLÉ account. To learn about ABLÉ account eligibility, visit the ABLÉ National Resource Center at [ablenrc.org](http://ablenrc.org).

*\*The amounts for Alaska and Hawaii are higher.*

# OPPORTUNITIES TO INCORPORATE ABLE ACCOUNT INFORMATION INTO FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS:

## 1. **Develop an understanding of savings barriers and opportunities for people with disabilities that receive public benefits:**

To create savings programs that are fully inclusive, it's necessary to understand barriers that might impact people with disabilities who receive needs-based benefits. ABLE accounts can complement the design and implementation of savings programs. For example, ABLE accounts can be incorporated into Children's Savings or Opportunity Accounts.

## 2. **Train staff on ABLE accounts:** Training financial empowerment staff on ABLE accounts provides an additional resource to encourage individuals with disabilities to save without impacting their eligibility for most federally-funded means-tested programs.

## 3. **Add ABLE account information to financial empowerment resource kits:** Materials can be downloaded from the resource section of the [ABLE National Resource Center \(ABLE NRC\) website](#). You can also contact your state program administrator for state-specific materials. To find the state ABLE program website, visit the ABLE NRC website and choose the appropriate state from the [state map tool](#). Add materials to your intake process, budgeting resources, financial counseling/coaching tools or other teachable moments on savings.

## 4. **Assist clients with opening an ABLE account:** ABLE accounts can only be opened online. Enrollment time averages less than 10 minutes and most state ABLE programs allow individuals from any state to participate. By reviewing ABLE enrollment websites with people with disabilities, you can help determine a savings plan that works best and enhances their savings behaviors. To compare state programs, use the ABLE NRC [state comparison tool](#).

## 🕒 **When to incorporate ABLE account information:**

- During your intake process (if individual is not in a crisis situation)
- While working towards a financial, education, employment or retirement related goal
- When sending saving goals reminders on the day employees receive their pay
- While assisting an individual with their tax filing
- During future planning sessions with individuals and families that have a family member with a disability
- When a large windfall is received (such as SSI or SSDI back-pay, an inheritance, insurance/lawsuit settlement or other large sum)
- Post-crisis situation planning
- When seeking employment/ changing jobs

## RESOURCES

### Quick Reference Guide on Savings

*"I cannot save money or I will lose my benefits."*

[nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/hob-playbook-savings.pdf](https://nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/hob-playbook-savings.pdf)

### Supplemental Guide on ABLE Accounts

[nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/supplemental-guide-able.pdf](https://nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/supplemental-guide-able.pdf)

### ABLE National Resource Center

[www.ablenrc.org](http://www.ablenrc.org)

### State Comparison Tool

[ablenrc.org/compare-states](http://ablenrc.org/compare-states)

### State Map Tool

[ablenrc.org/select-a-state-program](http://ablenrc.org/select-a-state-program)