

Disability Determination Services Processing Times

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Background

We are issuing this report to convey information related to State disability determination services (DDS) with Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 average processing times for initial disability claims that were outside the typical range of DDS processing times.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) provides Disability Insurance (DI) benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments to eligible individuals under Titles II and XVI of the *Social Security Act*. DDSs in the State or other office with jurisdiction make disability determinations. There are DDSs in each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Disability examiners, working with medical consultants, review medical evidence and the circumstances of disability claims to determine whether claimants meet SSA's definition of disability.

DDSs must follow State (meaning the 50 States, District of Columbia, or territories) personnel policies and procedures including State approval on hiring new staff. Each State has its own hiring practices. Federal regulations allow States to provide the organizational structure and qualified personnel needed to make disability determinations. Furthermore, States are required to adhere to applicable State-approved personnel standards in hiring staff.

Summary

We analyzed DI and SSI average claims processing times at 51 DDSs for FY 2013 (we excluded the Puerto Rico DDS from our analysis since it only processed DI claims). In FY 2013, DDS average processing times ranged from 45 to 140 days for DI claims and 49 to 157 days for SSI claims. We mapped the processing times for all 51 DDSs to identify processing times outside the typical range. In doing so, for the DI and SSI programs, we found 44 (86 percent) of 51 DDSs had processing times between 60 and 120 days.

We identified seven DDSs that fell outside of 60- to 120-day ranges for DI and SSI processing times. Specifically, the Florida and Idaho DDSs had DI and SSI processing times shorter than 60 days while the California, Virginia, Nevada, Colorado, and Hawaii DDSs had DI and SSI processing times longer than 120 days. Despite differences in processing times, the seven DDSs had allowance rates comparable to the national average and accuracy rates at or above SSA's goal.

We found a correlation between the processing times of some individual disability examiners and the five DDSs in our analysis with processing times that exceeded 120 days. We found the national median processing time for initial disability claims was 78 days in Calendar Year 2013. Further, all five DDSs with processing times longer than 120 days had disability examiners with average processing times for initial disability claims that were more than twice the national median. Conversely, neither of the DDSs with processing times shorter than 60 days had examiners with average processing times more than twice the median.

According to SSA, DDSs had already taken some actions to address the circumstances related to processing times that were more than twice the national median. However, SSA did not have specific details on the actions taken because they fell under State personnel practices. While SSA provides DDSs with program standards, leadership, and oversight, it does not become involved in the State's management of the program except as is necessary and in accordance with Federal regulations. As such, SSA would not usually be involved in DDS personnel-related actions.