

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

March 2009



Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) efforts to update the Listing of Impairments (the listings) used to determine whether a person is disabled.

Background

SSA uses the listings to help expedite the processing of disability claims. The listings for each body system describe impairments that are considered severe enough to prevent an adult from doing any gainful activity or to cause marked and severe functional limitations in a child younger than 18 years old. The listings are organized by major body systems—14 for adults (Part A) and 15 for children (Part B).

By the late 1990s, many of the listings were not up to date, but SSA was working to update them.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADOBEPDF/A-01-08-18023.pdf>

The Social Security Administration's Listing of Impairments (A-01-08-18023)

Our Findings

SSA has made progress in updating its listings, but some listings have not been updated in many years and do not reflect recent medical and technological advances.

In 2003, SSA implemented a new process for revising the listings. This new process was designed to ensure there are continuous updates and monitoring of the listings about every 3 to 4 years, with feedback loops to allow for increased input from Agency staff, medical experts and advocacy groups.

As of March 2009, of the 15 body systems,

- 1 had not been updated within 5 years, and the Agency had not published a time frame for issuing a revision;
- 6 had not been updated within 5 years, but SSA expected to update them in the next 12 months; and
- 8 had been updated within 5 years.

In January 2008, SSA officials informed the Government Accountability Office the Agency expected to finish updating all listings by mid-2010. In January 2009, SSA reported it was still on track to meet this goal.

Our Recommendations

Overall, SSA has made progress in updating the listings and has plans to keep them current. In addition, the Agency has developed a new process for updating the listings.

To ensure that the listings are current, we recommend SSA:

1. Update all listings over 5 years old.
2. Continue to monitor the listings to ensure they reflect medical and technological advances.