June 28, 2011

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
  Social Security
Committee on Ways and Means
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Becerra:

On April 15, 2010, at a Subcommittee on Social Security oversight hearing on Social Security Administration (SSA) field office service delivery, you asked my office to review the Internet claim (iClaim) application. Specifically, you expressed concern about whether applicants filing for benefits using the iClaim application were receiving an appropriate level of service from SSA. To address this concern, we initiated four reviews of the iClaim application. These reviews evaluated the iClaim application process and obtained individuals' perceptions of the iClaim application process for both Retirement and Disability Insurance benefits.

I appreciate the opportunity to share our insights on this important matter. Enclosed is the report for the last of our four reviews, which presents applicants' perceptions of the iClaim process for Disability Insurance benefits. To ensure SSA is aware of the information provided to your office, we are forwarding a copy of this report to the Agency.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please call me or have your staff contact Misha Kelly, Congressional and Intra-Governmental Liaison, at (202) 358-6319.

Sincerely,

Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General

Enclosure

cc:
Michael J. Astrue

CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSE REPORT

Applicant Experiences with Disability Insurance Benefit Internet Claim Applications

A-07-10-20176

June 2011

Mission

By conducting independent and objective audits, evaluations and investigations, we inspire public confidence in the integrity and security of SSA's programs and operations and protect them against fraud, waste and abuse. We provide timely, useful and reliable information and advice to Administration officials, Congress and the public.

Authority

The Inspector General Act created independent audit and investigative units, called the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The mission of the OIG, as spelled out in the Act, is to:

- ❍ Conduct and supervise independent and objective audits and investigations relating to agency programs and operations.
- ❍ Promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency within the agency.
- ❍ Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in agency programs and operations.
- ❍ Review and make recommendations regarding existing and proposed legislation and regulations relating to agency programs and operations.
- ❍ Keep the agency head and the Congress fully and currently informed of problems in agency programs and operations.

To ensure objectivity, the IG Act empowers the IG with:

- ❍ Independence to determine what reviews to perform.
- ❍ Access to all information necessary for the reviews.
- ❍ Authority to publish findings and recommendations based on the reviews.

Vision

We strive for continual improvement in SSA's programs, operations and management by proactively seeking new ways to prevent and deter fraud, waste and abuse. We commit to integrity and excellence by supporting an environment that provides a valuable public service while encouraging employee development and retention and fostering diversity and innovation.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of our review was to obtain applicants' perceptions of the Internet claim (iClaim) process for Disability Insurance benefits (DIB).

BACKGROUND

In response to customer requests for more Internet services and the requirements of the *Government Paperwork Elimination Act of 1998*,[1] the Social Security Administration (SSA) allows applicants to complete and electronically sign an online application for certain Title II Social Security benefits.[2] Specifically, applicants can use the Internet to file for DIB, Retirement Insurance benefits, and aged spouse's benefits.[3] In December 2008, SSA implemented the iClaim application, which modified prior versions of the Internet application.[4]

During the iClaim application process, applicants are alerted that, in addition to submitting the formal iClaim application for DIB, they will need to complete and submit to SSA two additional forms: Form SSA-3368-BK (*Disability Report-Adult*) and Form SSA-827 (*Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*). Applicants are given the option to complete the Internet version of the *Disability Report-Adult* and submit it electronically or call SSA's 800-number to arrange for in-office or telephone assistance.[5] The *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* is available online for the applicant to print and sign, but it must be mailed to SSA or delivered in person to an SSA field office.[6] If an applicant does not submit both a *Disability Report-Adult* and an *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*, SSA must re-contact the applicant to obtain the missing form(s).[7]

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[1] Pub. L. No. 105-277, 112 Stat. 2681-749.

[2] SSA, POMS, GN 00204.055 A. (effective 05/10/2010).

[3] SSA, POMS, GN 00204.055 B. (effective 05/10/2010).

[4] SSA, Teleservice Center Operating Guide, TC 31507.010 A. (effective 10/14/2010).

[5] SSA, POMS, GN 00204.055 L. (effective 05/10/2010).

[6] The formal iClaim application instructs the applicant on how to complete the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*.

[7] SSA, POMS, GN 00204.055 L. (effective 05/10/2010).

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, SSA received approximately 3 million DIB applications, with approximately 800,000 (27 percent) received via iClaim. SSA expects to have 38 percent of DIB applications submitted using the iClaim application in FY 2012.[8]

At an April 15, 2010 hearing before the House of Representatives' Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security, Congressman Xavier Becerra asked the Office of the Inspector General to review the iClaim application to ensure individuals filing for benefits using the iClaim application were receiving an appropriate level of service from SSA.

To address Congressman Becerra's request, we selected a random sample of 250 DIB iClaim applications filed in May 2010. We attempted to contact the sampled applicants to obtain their perceptions of filing for DIB online. However, we were only able to hold discussions with 154 (62 percent) of the 250 applicants. For the 96 applicants who did not have a discussion completed,

- 29 could not be contacted (we attempted to call these applicants at least 3 times),
- 5 were deceased,
- 31 declined to participate, and
- 31 did not have a valid telephone number. [9]

In addition to the discussions with applicants, we conducted focus groups to obtain public insight about the DIB iClaim application.[10]

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[8] SSA, Social Security Administration Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Overview, p. 14, February 2011.

[9] *See* Appendix B for a detailed discussion of the scope, methodology, and sample results for our review.

[10] *See* Appendix C for focus group scope and methodology.

We held discussions with 154 of the 250 sampled applicants and found the applicants had a positive experience filing for DIB online. In fact, we found that the majority of the applicants understood the questions asked of them in the iClaim application, found the iClaim application easy to navigate, and were able to easily save their progress and return to the application if needed.

We also found that not all applicants completed and submitted the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* to SSA. Further, applicants did not always use the online version of the *Disability Report-Adult.* However, those applicants who did complete the Report online understood the questions it asked.
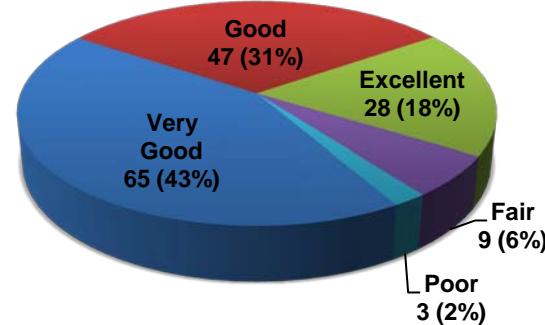
In addition, we found that some applicants in our review were contacted by an SSA employee when it was necessary to obtain more information or clarification of information in the iClaim application and the *Disability Report-Adult.*

Also as a part of this review, we used a contractor to conduct focus groups to obtain public insight about filing for DIB online using SSA's iClaim application.[11] The overwhelming majority of the focus group participants indicated they would use the online application to file for DIB. The participants provided many opinions about the DIB iClaim application process that we will share with SSA under a separate cover.

APPLICANTS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE DIB ICLAIM APPLICATION

Based on our discussions, we determined that the majority of the applicants had a positive experience with the DIB iClaim application. In fact, 140 of the 154 applicants identified their experience filing online to be excellent, very good, or good, with most of the applicants rating their experience as very good (*see* Chart 1).[12]

Chart 1: Overall Experience with the iClaim Application

Good 47 (31%)
Excellent 28 (18%)
Very Good 65 (43%)
Fair 9 (6%)
Poor 3 (2%)

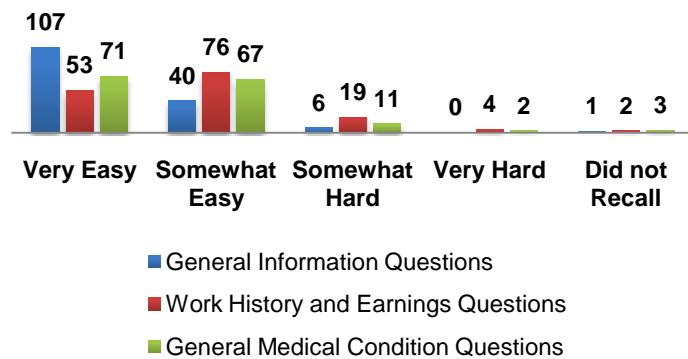[11] *See* Appendix C for focus group scope and methodology.

[12] One applicant ended the call before rating her experience filing online, and one applicant did not feel it was fair to rate his experience because his difficulty was due to his medical condition. Therefore, Chart 1 only includes 152 of the 154 applicants. The 12 applicants who felt the iClaim was fair or poor cited various reasons for their experience. Specifically, three applicants felt the application was too long; two applicants felt the questions were repetitive; two applicants had difficulty explaining their answers; one applicant felt the questions were confusing; one applicant had difficulty with navigation; one applicant had difficulty remembering requested information; one applicant had difficulty due to her mental impairment; and one applicant had difficulty operating the computer.

One applicant stated the iClaim application was very good and thought it was self-explanatory and easy to complete. Another applicant said, "The whole process went very smoothly."

Understandability of the DIB iClaim Application Questions

The majority of the applicants indicated they understood the questions asked in the iClaim application. In fact, 147 of the 154 applicants responded that answering the questions about general information for their claim—such as marital history, dependent children, and military service—was somewhat easy or very easy (*see* blue bars in Chart 2).[13] In addition, 129 of the 154 applicants responded that it was somewhat easy or very easy to understand the questions about their work history and earnings (*see* red bars in Chart 2).[14] Finally, 138 of the 154 applicants responded that providing general information about their medical condition—such as ability to work or whether they were receiving workers' compensation or other disability benefits—was somewhat easy or very easy (*see* green bars in Chart 2).[15]

Chart 2: Ability to Answer DIB iClaim Questions

	Very Easy	Somewhat Easy	Somewhat Hard	Very Hard	Did not Recall
General Information Questions	107	40	6	0	1
Work History and Earnings Questions	53	76	19	4	2
General Medical Condition Questions	71	67	11	2	3

[13] Of the seven remaining applicants, one did not recall whether he had difficulty answering the questions. The six applicants who felt answering general information questions was somewhat hard cited various reasons for the difficulty. Specifically, two applicants had difficulty understanding the questions; and one applicant did not know how to respond to the questions. In addition, three applicants had difficulty remembering the requested information. The applicants' inability to remember the requested information is beyond SSA's control.

[14] Of the 25 remaining applicants, 2 did not recall whether they had difficulty answering the questions. The 23 remaining applicants who felt answering the work history and earnings questions was somewhat hard or very hard cited various reasons for the difficulty. Specifically, four applicants did not know how to respond to the questions, and two applicants had difficulty understanding the questions. In addition, 16 applicants had difficulty remembering the requested information, and 1 applicant did not remember why the questions were difficult to answer. The applicants' inability to remember the requested information is beyond SSA's control.

[15] Of the 16 remaining applicants, 3 did not recall whether they had difficulty answering the general questions about their medical condition. The 13 remaining applicants who felt it was somewhat hard or very hard to answer the questions cited various reasons for the difficulty. Specifically, five applicants had difficulty understanding the questions. In addition, five applicants had difficulty explaining their medical condition; two applicants had difficulty remembering the requested information; and one applicant did not recall why she thought the questions were difficult to answer. The applicants' inability to provide the requested information is beyond SSA's control.

The results of our review show that, from a customer service perspective, SSA had made the questions on the iClaim application easy to understand for most applicants filing for DIB via the Internet.

Ability to Navigate the DIB iClaim Application

The majority of the applicants in our review stated that the iClaim was very easy or somewhat easy to navigate. Specifically, 135 of the 154 applicants rated their navigation of the iClaim as very easy or somewhat easy.[16] In addition, 79 of the 154 applicants saved their progress on the iClaim application and completed it at a later time. Of these 79 applicants, 70 stated it was very easy or easy to return to the application.[17] One applicant stated that he liked being able to reenter the iClaim application because he did not initially have all the information he needed to complete his application.

Furthermore, there were 37 applicants who changed their answers after reviewing the information they had entered into the iClaim application. Of these, 33 indicated that it was either very easy or easy to make the changes.[18]

The results of our review show that, from a customer service perspective, SSA made the iClaim application easy to navigate for applicants filing for DIB via the Internet.

APPLICANTS' EXPERIENCES WITH SUPPLEMENTARY FORMS

As previously discussed, during the iClaim application process, applicants are alerted that, in addition to submitting the formal application for DIB, they also need to complete and submit the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* and the *Disability Report-Adult*.[19] However, we found that not all applicants completed and submitted the supplementary forms. In addition, even though

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[16] Of the 19 remaining applicants, 4 did not recall their ability to navigate the iClaim application. The 15 remaining applicants who felt the iClaim was somewhat hard or very hard to navigate cited various reasons for the difficulty. Specifically, five applicants found the formatting hard to navigate; one applicant was unable to enter some of the required information into the application; and one applicant used an internet browser that was incompatible with the iClaim application. In addition, four applicants had difficulty due to their mental impairments; three applicants had difficulty operating the computer; and one applicant did not remember why it was difficult to navigate the iClaim application. The applicants' mental impairments and computer difficulties are beyond SSA's control.

[17] Of the nine remaining applicants, one did not recall how easy or hard it was to reenter the application. The eight remaining applicants felt it was hard or very hard to reenter the application for various reasons. Specifically, five applicants had difficulty figuring out how to reenter the application; and two applicants were not allowed to reenter the application. In addition, one applicant did not write down the application number needed to reenter the application. The applicant's not writing down the application number is beyond SSA's control.

[18] Of the four remaining applicants, two had difficulty getting back to the item; one used an Internet browser that was incompatible with the online application; and one could not change the information.

[19] SSA, POMS, GN 00204.055 L. (effective 05/10/2010).

a number of applicants did not complete the *Disability Report-Adult* online, the majority of those who did complete the form online indicated they understood the questions it contained.

Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration

The *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* authorizes SSA to retrieve relevant medical and non-medical information to assist the Agency in determining whether the individual meets SSA's definition of a disability. Specifically, SSA and State disability determination services (DDS) use the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* to obtain evidence of the alleged medical conditions and treatments from the doctors, hospitals, and other sources the applicant provided.[20] If SSA does not receive the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*, it may deny the application.[21]

Of the 154 applicants in our review, 43 did not initially submit the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* and had to be contacted by SSA.[22] When asked why they did not print and submit the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*, the applicants cited three main reasons—not knowing it was required, not having a printer available, and not knowing it was available online.

Disability Report-Adult

On the *Disability Report-Adult*, applicants provide information regarding medical conditions, work history, education, medicines, and treatments. DDSs use the *Disability Report-Adult* to develop medical or other types of evidence, establish the correct disability onset date, and assess the alleged disability in conjunction with non-medical factors.[23] If SSA does not receive the *Disability Report-Adult*, it will likely deny the individual's application.[24]

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[20] SSA, POMS, DI 11005.055 A. (effective 10/19/2010).

[21] SSA can still process an application without the Form SSA-827 if the individual provided medical evidence. SSA, POMS, DI 11018.005 C.3.a. (effective 02/02/2011).

[22] Two applicants ended the call before discussing Form SSA-827.

[23] SSA, POMS, DI 11005.023 A. (effective 03/250/2010). Non-medical factors include the individual's education and work history.
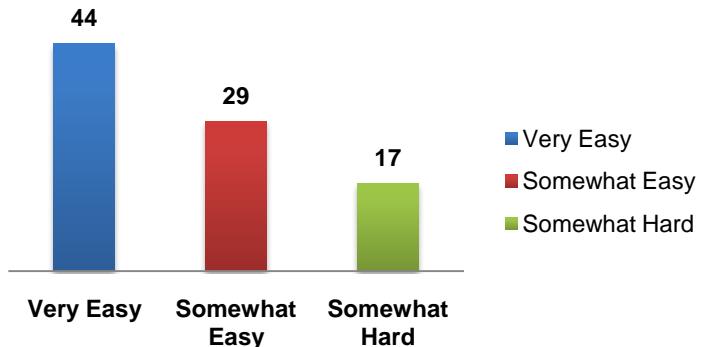
[24] SSA can still process an application without the *Disability Report-Adult* if the individual provided medical evidence. SSA, POMS, DI 11018.005 C.3.a. (effective 02/02/2011).

Of the 154 applicants in our review, 33 did not complete the online version of the *Disability Report-Adult*.[25] When asked why they did not complete the online version of the *Disability Report-Adult*, the applicants cited various reasons. Several applicants stated it was easier to complete the Report with SSA's assistance. For example, one applicant stated that she had so many medical records she thought it would be easier to complete the Report at a Social Security office. Another applicant stated that he went to a Social Security office to get help filing the Report because it was hard for him to understand some of the questions. Applicants also stated that they did not realize the Report was available online or they did not know the Report was required.

Of the 91 applicants who completed the *Disability Report-Adult* online, 83 indicated their experience with the online Report was excellent, very good, or good, with most of the applicants rating their experience as very good.[26]

The majority of the applicants who completed the *Disability Report-Adult* online indicated they understood the questions it contained. In fact, 73 of the 91 applicants who completed the *Disability Report-Adult* online responded that answering the questions about detailed medical, work, and education history were very easy or somewhat easy (*see* Chart 3).[27] One applicant stated that, once she was able to gather all of the necessary information, the questions on the *Disability Report-Adult* were very easy to answer.

Chart 3: Ability to Answer Adult Disability Report Questions

Very Easy: 44
Somewhat Easy: 29
Somewhat Hard: 17

- Very Easy
- Somewhat Easy
- Somewhat Hard

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[25] Of the remaining 121 applicants, 91 completed the online version of the *Disability Report-Adult*, 21 did not recall how they completed the Report, and 9 did not complete the Report.

[26] One applicant ended the call before rating her experience filing the *Disability Report-Adult* online. The seven applicants who felt *Disability Report-Adult* was fair, poor, or very poor cited various reasons for their experience. Specifically, two applicants felt the Report was long and repetitious; one applicant did not like the formatting; and one applicant had difficulty locating the Report. In addition, three applicants had difficulty remembering requested information. The applicants' inability to remember the requested information is beyond SSA's control.

[27] One applicant ended the call before rating the questions about detailed medical, work, and education history. Therefore, we only included 90 of the 91 applicants who filed the *Disability Report-Adult* online in Chart 3. The 17 applicants who felt the detailed medical, work, and education history questions were somewhat hard cited various reasons for the difficulty. Specifically, three applicants felt it asked too many questions; two applicants did not know how to answer the questions; and one applicant thought it was not user friendly. In addition, eight applicants had difficulty remembering the requested information; and four applicants did not give a specific reason for their difficulty. The applicants' inability to remember the requested information is beyond SSA's control. The total number of reasons applicants had difficulty with the detailed medical, work, and education history questions is greater than the number of applicants who did not give a rating of very easy or easy because one applicant gave multiple reasons.

SSA RE-CONTACT WITH APPLICANTS

Under certain circumstances, an SSA employee must re-contact an applicant for more information, or clarification of information, in the iClaim application or the *Disability Report-Adult* before the iClaim can be processed. Of the 154 applicants in our review, 88 recalled being re-contacted by an SSA employee after submitting their iClaim application.[28, 29] According to the applicants, the employees re-contacted them predominantly for two issues—to obtain additional medical information or to complete the *Disability Report-Adult* (*see* Table 1).

Table 1: Reasons for Re-contact[30]

Re-contact Issue	Applicants	
Did Not Recall	27	31%
Obtain Additional Medical Information	16	18%
Complete the *Disability Report-Adult*	14	16%
Work History or Earnings	11	13%
Other[31]	9	10%
Complete the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*	8	9%
Schedule Medical Examination	5	6%
Needed Documentation	4	5%
Discuss Daily Activities	4	5%
Total	**98**	**113%**

We did not review the accuracy of the iClaim applications or *Disability Report-Adults* processed for the applicants in our review. Therefore, we cannot conclude that SSA made all necessary re-contacts. However, our review did provide evidence that SSA was following up with applicants to obtain additional information or clarification.

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[28] Two applicants ended the call before discussing re-contacts by SSA.

[29] In May 2011, we issued a review that surveyed the SSA employees who processed the 250 DIB iClaim applications in our sample, and provides more in-depth reasons for employee re-contact. The review found that the SSA employees re-contacted 170 of the sampled individuals to obtain additional information or clarification. SSA employees re-contacted these individuals predominantly for three issues—the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* had not been received; the *Disability Report-Adult* had not been received or was incomplete; and to take an application or discuss eligibility for Supplemental Security Income. SSA, OIG, *Internet Claim Applications for Disability Insurance Benefits* (A-07-10-20166), available at http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADOBEPDF/ A-07-10-20166.pdf.

[30] The total number of reasons applicants were re-contacted is greater than the number of applicants who were re-contacted because some applicants were re-contacted for multiple reasons. Therefore, the total percentage of applicants who were re-contacted for various reasons is also greater than 100 percent.

[31] *See* Appendix B, Table B-12 for all reasons for re-contact.
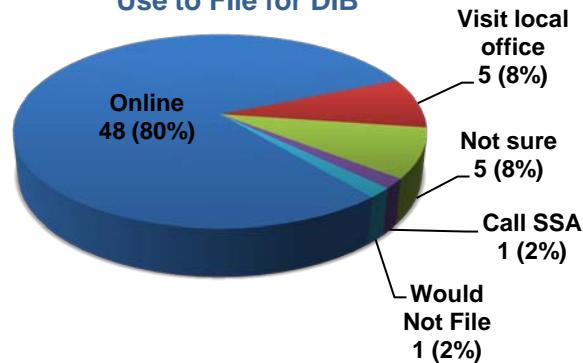
FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

As part of this review, we used a contractor to conduct six focus groups in Miami, Florida; Dallas, Texas; and Los Angeles, California. The contractor conducted 2 focus groups—with 10 participants each—in each city.[32] In part, we sought to determine whether participants would use the DIB iClaim application if they were to file a claim for DIB; and whether they understood the questions asked in the DIB iClaim application and in the *Disability Report-Adult*.

When asked, 48 of the 60 participants indicated they would attempt to file online using the iClaim application (*see* Chart 4). One participant who would not file online stated, "I think if I was filing for disability, I probably would need help because that's why you're filing for disability. So I would go for an advocate or somebody to help me." Another participant stated, "I'm the one who would call…my disability would keep me from getting in or getting on the computer, or I'm think[ing] of my mother who's old and can't use the computer.…"

Chart 4: Method Participants Would Use to File for DIB

- Online 48 (80%)
- Visit local office 5 (8%)
- Not sure 5 (8%)
- Call SSA 1 (2%)
- Would Not File 1 (2%)

The focus group participants provided many opinions about the process for applying online for DIB. Examples follow.

- Participants said that the "Apply Online for Disability benefits" page was text-heavy and cluttered, and some participants did not notice the link to the "Adult Disability Checklist," which provides details about what is needed before starting the online process.

- Participants were disappointed to learn that they still had to submit documents to Social Security by mail or in person. They felt this was inconsistent with lauding the conveniences of applying online. Participants indicated it would be helpful to be able to electronically scan and submit supporting documentation to SSA.

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[32] *See* Appendix C for focus group scope and methodology.

- Participants stated that the instructions were not clear for the section on "Doctors and Other Healthcare Professionals" in the *Disability Report-Adult*. Some participants wondered whether they should list all healthcare providers they had ever seen for the condition or only those they were currently seeing. One participant stated, "What does Social Security want? Do they want the doctor who treated you when you were 6 years old? I doubt it, but I think there should be instruction [such as] 'List current doctors, and any and all doctors and healthcare providers involved in any way with this disability.'"

- Participants stated the instructions were not clear for the section on "Medicines" in the *Disability Report-Adult*. Some participants wondered whether they should include over-the-counter medicines and whether they should enter only the medicines they were currently taking or all medicines they had ever taken for their disabling condition.

To ensure SSA is aware of all of the opinions expressed by the focus group participants, we will provide the Agency with a copy of the contractor's focus group report.

During our discussions with the applicants in our review, we found a high level of satisfaction with the DIB iClaim application. Specifically, 140 of the 154 applicants we were able to contact found their overall experience filing the iClaim application online to be excellent, very good, or good. Most applicants also responded that the questions asked in the iClaim application were easy to understand, they found the iClaim application easy to navigate, and they were able to easily save their progress and return to the application if needed.

We also found that, for varying reasons, a number of applicants did not initially submit the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration* and had to be contacted by SSA. In addition, we found that applicants had varying preferences on the method used to complete the *Disability Report-Adult.* However, most applicants who did complete the *Disability Report-Adult* online had a positive experience with the form and understood the questions asked in it.

Additionally, we found that SSA was following up with applicants to obtain additional information or clarification of information in the iClaim application and in the *Disability Report-Adult.*

Furthermore, the majority of the focus group participants indicated they would use the online application to file for DIB. The focus group participants provided many opinions about the DIB iClaim application process that we will share with SSA.

Appendices

Acronyms

DDS	Disability Determination Services
DIB	Disability Insurance Benefits
FY	Fiscal Year
iClaim	Internet Claim
POMS	Program Operations Manual System
Pub. L. No.	Public Law Number
SSA	Social Security Administration

Forms

SSA-3368-BK	*Disability Report-Adult*
SSA-827	*Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*

Scope, Methodology, and Sample Results

To address Congressman Becerra's request related to the Internet claim (iClaim) application process, we:

- Reviewed applicable Federal laws and regulations and sections of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Program Operations Manual System related to the iClaim application process.

- Reviewed prior Office of the Inspector General reports related to SSA's electronic services.

- Obtained a data extract from SSA of 60,943 Disability Insurance benefits (DIB) iClaim applications filed in May 2010.[1]

- From the data extract, we selected a random sample of 250 DIB iClaim applications. For each sampled DIB iClaim application, we

    - ✓ mailed applicants up to 2 letters regarding our review;

    - ✓ recorded information provided regarding their experiences using the iClaim for those we were able to contact; and

    - ✓ completed discussions with 154 of the 250 applicants in our sample. For the 96 applicants who did not have a discussion completed,

        - ▪ 29 were unable to be contacted,[2]

        - ▪ 5 were deceased,

        - ▪ 31 declined to participate, and

        - ▪ 31 did not have a valid telephone number.

- Conducted focus groups to obtain public insight about filing for DIB online using SSA's iClaim application. Specifically, we used a contractor to hold six focus groups in Miami, Florida; Dallas, Texas; and Los Angeles, California. The contractor conducted 2 focus groups—with 10 participants each—in each city.[3]

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[1] SSA's Management Information Report for May 2010 reported 65,579 DIB iClaim applications were filed in May 2010. Therefore, the data extract contained 4,636 applications fewer than SSA identified. According to SSA, the discrepancy was due to a timing issue between the system that produces the Management Information Report and the system from which the data extract was pulled. We accepted this explanation from SSA and determined the data extract was materially complete to meet the objectives of this review.

[2] We attempted to call applicants with a valid telephone number at least three times.

[3] *See* Appendix C for focus group scope and methodology.

Our work was conducted at the Office of Audit in Kansas City, Missouri, from May 2010 through April 2011. The entity reviewed was the Office of Operations. We determined that the data used in this report were sufficiently reliable given the objective and their intended use. We conducted our review in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*.

SAMPLE RESULTS

Table B-1: Rating of Social Security's Internet Claim Application

	Applicants	
Excellent	28	18%
Very Good	65	43%
Good	47	31%
Fair	9	6%
Poor	3	2%

Table B-2: Ability to Answer Questions About General Information in the Internet Claim Application

	Applicants	
Very Easy	107	69%
Somewhat Easy	40	26%
Somewhat Hard	6	4%
Did Not Recall	1	1%

Table B-3: Ability to Answer Questions About Work History and Earnings in the Internet Claim Application

	Applicants	
Very Easy	53	35%
Somewhat Easy	76	49%
Somewhat Hard	19	12%
Very Hard	4	3%
Did Not Recall	2	1%

Table B-4: Ability to Answer Questions About General Medical Condition in the Internet Claim Application

	Applicants	
Very Easy	71	46%
Somewhat Easy	67	44%
Somewhat Hard	11	7%
Very Hard	2	1%
Did Not Recall	3	2%

Table B-5: Ability to Navigate the Online Internet Claim Application

	Applicants	
Very Easy	51	33%
Somewhat Easy	84	55%
Somewhat Hard	10	6%
Very Hard	5	3%
Did Not Recall	4	3%

Table B-6: Ability to Return to the Internet Claim Application

	Applicants	
Very Easy	30	38%
Easy	40	51%
Hard	5	6%
Very Hard	3	4%
Did Not Recall	1	1%

Table B-7: Ability to Make Changes to Information Already Entered into the Internet Claim Application

	Applicants	
Very Easy	14	38%
Somewhat Easy	19	51%
Somewhat Hard	3	8%
Very Hard	1	3%

Table B-8: Submitting the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*

	Applicants	
Printed and Submitted to SSA	84	55%
Contacted by SSA	43	28%
Did not Recall	18	12%
Neither	7	5%

Table B-9: Manner in Which Applicants Completed the *Disability Report-Adult*

	Applicants	
Online	91	59%
Did Not Recall	21	14%
During an Interview with a Social Security Employee	20	13%
Paper Copy	13	8%
Did Not Complete the *Disability Report-Adult*	9	6%

Table B-10: Rating of Social Security's Internet *Disability Report-Adult*

	Applicants	
Excellent	16	18%
Very Good	35	39%
Good	32	36%
Fair	4	4%
Poor	2	2%
Very Poor	1	1%

Table B-11: Ability to Answer the Detailed Medical, Work, and Education History on the *Disability Report-Adult*

	Applicants	
Very Easy	44	49%
Somewhat Easy	29	32%
Somewhat Hard	17	19%

Table B-12: Reasons for Contact by Social Security Employees

	Applicants	
Did Not Recall	27	31%
Obtain Additional Medical Information	16	18%
Complete the *Disability Report-Adult*	14	16%
Work History or Earnings	11	13%
Complete the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*	8	9%
Schedule a Medical Examination	5	6%
Needed Documentation	4	5%
Discuss Daily Activities	4	5%
Auxiliaries	3	3%
Confirm Information Provided	2	2%
Schedule an Appointment with Social Security	2	2%
Eligibility for Other Benefits	1	1%
Marital History, Dependent Children, or Military Service	1	1%

Focus Group Scope and Methodology

DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUPS

We used a contractor to hold six focus groups in Miami, Florida; Dallas, Texas; and Los Angeles, California. The contractor conducted 2 focus groups—with 10 participants each—in each city. Participant criteria for the focus groups were as follows.

Focus Group 1

- In the 30−49 year age range with an equitable distribution of male and female participants in each focus group.
- Fluent in English.
- Not currently employed by the Government (including the Social Security Administration [SSA]).
- Had not applied for Social Security benefits and was not already receiving them.
- Experienced with Internet usage.
- Mix of race/ethnicity, gender, income, and education.

Focus Group 2

- In the 50–67 year age range with an equitable distribution of male and female participants in each focus group.
- Fluent in English.
- Not currently employed by the Government (including SSA).
- Had not applied for Social Security benefits and was not already receiving them.
- Experienced with Internet usage.
- Mix of race/ethnicity, gender, income, and education.

METHODOLOGY

The contractor showed participants in both groups various pages of the online Disability Insurance benefit Internet claim (iClaim) Application, *Disability Report-Adult*, and the *Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration*. The contractor then asked participants about their understanding and opinion of the various pages.

DISTRIBUTION SCHEDULE

Commissioner of Social Security

Chairman and Ranking Member, Committee on Ways and Means

Chief of Staff, Committee on Ways and Means

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Social Security

Majority and Minority Staff Director, Subcommittee on Social Security

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on the Budget, House of
  Representatives

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Appropriations, House of
  Representatives

Chairman and Ranking Minority, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
  Education and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
  Services, Education and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Finance

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Social Security Pensions and
  Family Policy

Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, Senate Special Committee on Aging

Social Security Advisory Board

Overview of the Office of the Inspector General

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is comprised of an Office of Audit (OA), Office of Investigations (OI), Office of the Counsel to the Inspector General (OCIG), Office of External Relations (OER), and Office of Technology and Resource Management (OTRM). To ensure compliance with policies and procedures, internal controls, and professional standards, the OIG also has a comprehensive Professional Responsibility and Quality Assurance program.

Office of Audit

OA conducts financial and performance audits of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) programs and operations and makes recommendations to ensure program objectives are achieved effectively and efficiently. Financial audits assess whether SSA's financial statements fairly present SSA's financial position, results of operations, and cash flow. Performance audits review the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of SSA's programs and operations. OA also conducts short-term management reviews and program evaluations on issues of concern to SSA, Congress, and the general public.

Office of Investigations

OI conducts investigations related to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in SSA programs and operations. This includes wrongdoing by applicants, beneficiaries, contractors, third parties, or SSA employees performing their official duties. This office serves as liaison to the Department of Justice on all matters relating to the investigation of SSA programs and personnel. OI also conducts joint investigations with other Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies.

Office of the Counsel to the Inspector General

OCIG provides independent legal advice and counsel to the IG on various matters, including statutes, regulations, legislation, and policy directives. OCIG also advises the IG on investigative procedures and techniques, as well as on legal implications and conclusions to be drawn from audit and investigative material. Also, OCIG administers the Civil Monetary Penalty program.

Office of External Relations

OER manages OIG's external and public affairs programs, and serves as the principal advisor on news releases and in providing information to the various news reporting services. OER develops OIG's media and public information policies, directs OIG's external and public affairs programs, and serves as the primary contact for those seeking information about OIG. OER prepares OIG publications, speeches, and presentations to internal and external organizations, and responds to Congressional correspondence.

Office of Technology and Resource Management

OTRM supports OIG by providing information management and systems security. OTRM also coordinates OIG's budget, procurement, telecommunications, facilities, and human resources. In addition, OTRM is the focal point for OIG's strategic planning function, and the development and monitoring of performance measures. In addition, OTRM receives and assigns for action allegations of criminal and administrative violations of Social Security laws, identifies fugitives receiving benefit payments from SSA, and provides technological assistance to investigations.