

# Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

December 2008



## Objective

To determine the Social Security Administration's (SSA) average overall processing time for disability claims decided by the disability determination services (DDS), Administrative Law Judges (ALJ), Appeals Council, (AC) and the Federal Courts.

## Background

SSA provides Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income disability benefits to eligible individuals under Title II and Title XVI of the Social Security Act. To receive either benefit, an individual must first file an application with SSA.

If the applicant disagrees with the initial disability determination, he or she can file an appeal within 60 days from the date of being notified of the determination. In most cases, there are four levels of appeal, including a: (1) reconsideration by the DDS, (2) hearing by an ALJ, (3) review by the AC and (4) review by the Federal Courts.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-01-08-18011.pdf>

## Disability Claims Overall Processing Times (A-01-08-18011)

### Our Findings

Based on our sample, we determined the average overall processing time for disability claims completed in Calendar Year 2006 from the date of application to the date of denial or the date benefits were paid at time of allowance (including any back payments).

- ✓ 131 days for cases decided at the DDS level (initial claims);
- ✓ 279 days for cases decided at the DDS level (reconsiderations);
- ✓ 811 days for cases decided at the ALJ level;
- ✓ 1,053 days for cases decided at the Appeals Council level; and
- ✓ 1,720 days for cases decided at the Federal Court level.

### Our Recommendation

We believe the processing times determined in our review may assist SSA and the Congress in making decisions about the disability programs. According to SSA's Strategic Plan, "[the Agency's] effectiveness will be determined by how well [SSA] meets the needs and expectations of the American people. Its success will also be measured by how we manage resources to provide services and benefits in a way that is responsive to the American public."

Therefore, we recommended SSA develop and publish a measure that shows the overall disability processing time from the claimant's perspective.

SSA agreed that the recommendation would benefit the Agency, Congress, the public, and prospective disability claimants. The Agency stated it previously considered using this type of performance measure but did not move forward because it was unable to capture the management information necessary to calculate this measure. Further, SSA stated that making systems changes to capture additional data would require redirecting already limited resources.