The Social Security Administration's Efforts to Develop its Own Source of Occupational Information for Use in its Disability Programs
A-01-15-15035

SOCIAL SECURITY
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OIG

Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) progress in developing its own source of occupational information for use in its disability programs.

Background

In most cases, SSA determines whether an adult is disabled based on whether his/her impairments prevent him/her from doing (a) past relevant work as he/she performed it or as is generally performed in the national economy or (b) any other work in the national economy. Therefore, SSA needs information about work in the national economy.

Since the 1960s, SSA has relied on the Department of Labor's (DoL) *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* (DOT) as its primary source of occupational information. However, DoL stopped updating the DOT in 1991.

In 1998, DoL replaced the DOT with another system. However, according to SSA, this other system did not meet the needs of SSA's disability programs. Thus, in 2008, SSA decided to develop its own source of occupational information (the Occupational Information System), and, in 2012, SSA began working with DoL's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to help do this.

Findings

Since SSA began working with BLS, it has made progress on the project, but it has more work to do. As of March 2018, BLS had developed a collection methodology and begun collecting the first set of occupational information, which it plans to finish by the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. Among other things, SSA contracted with a private company to help it build the Vocational Information Tool that will be used to house and access the Occupational Information System. SSA plans to implement the system in FY 2020.

The first set of occupational information will not include the mental/cognitive demands of work for disability adjudication or a small portion of occupations because of certain challenges with the collection methodology. However, SSA has taken steps to address these challenges.

SSA plans to update the Occupational Information System in FY 2024 with a second set of occupational information that BLS plans to begin collecting annually at the end of 2018. This set may include the mental/cognitive demands of work and more occupations. SSA also plans to continue updating the Occupational Information System about every 5 years. With current information, SSA expects it will improve the quality of its disability determinations. Therefore, it is important SSA does not experience any delays in rolling out the Occupational Information System and allocates sufficient funds each year to continue the project.

Agency Comments

SSA will continue to expand its data collection by adding mental and cognitive survey questions and adjusting its collection methodology so that more occupations are captured beginning in September 2018. SSA's target date for implementing the Occupational Information System is FY 2020, and it will continue to work diligently to avoid delays in its implementation. SSA also agreed that it is important to allocate sufficient funds on an ongoing basis so that the information remains current and accurate.