

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

August 2011



Objective

The Honorable Sam Johnson, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Social Security, requested we review the status of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) efforts to provide electronic services to claimant representatives. Specifically, our review focused on SSA's initiatives to (1) allow Internet appeals; (2) provide claimant representatives Internet access to electronic folders; (3) provide notices and other information to claimant representatives through the Internet; and (4) reduce compact disc (CD) use for sharing claimant information.

Background

In May 2007, the Commissioner of Social Security testified on the Agency's plans to implement various initiatives to reduce the backlog of disability claims. One of these initiatives was to expand Internet support for claimant representatives.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-05-11-01124.pdf>

Congressional Response Report: *Electronic Services for Claimant Representatives* (A-05-11-01124)

Our Findings

At the time of our review, SSA was implementing several electronic initiatives while expanding others. These initiatives provided alternatives to claimant representatives while helping streamline hearing-related workloads in field and hearing offices.

- In the first 8 months of Fiscal Year 2011, claimants filed approximately 52 percent of all requests for hearings using iAppeals. Claimant use of iAppeals has increased over the years, thereby removing workloads from SSA's field offices.
- As of the end of June 2011, SSA enrolled approximately 6,400 claimant representatives in Appointed Representative Services (ARS), corresponding to approximately 71 percent of the represented claimants who filed appeals. ARS will eventually reduce a claimant representative's need for CDs and lessen hearing office and Appeals Council workloads related to producing the CDs.
- SSA maintains electronic copies of hearing-related notices in eFolders, which are available to ARS participants. However, SSA does not notify representatives when it adds a notice. In addition, SSA prints notices centrally, and for at least one type of notice, generates them automatically, thereby reducing the time spent by hearing office staff on such tasks.

Even with electronic services, claimant representatives still need to be invited and then register in person for eFolder access via ARS. In addition, ARS participants still receive paper notices in the mail. Moreover, implementing ARS will not eliminate the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review's need to produce encrypted CDs for claimant representatives who do not use ARS as well as for other parties attending hearings. SSA plans to expand eFolder access to additional hearing participants, such as experts, and include additional information in ARS, such as digital recordings of the hearings and reports on the status of pending hearings.