

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

June 2011



Objective

To evaluate the actions the Social Security Administration (SSA) had taken or planned to take to reduce its initial disability claims backlog to a pending level of 525,000 by Fiscal Year (FY) 2014.

Background

In FY 2008, SSA began experiencing a significant increase in initial disability claims applications. As a result of the increased number of applications, the number of initial cases pending at SSA had grown to over 840,000 by the end of FY 2010, which was about 49 percent higher than at the end of FY 2008.

SSA's goal is to reduce pending initial disability claims to 525,000 by FY 2014. To accomplish this goal, SSA released its *Strategy to Address Increasing Initial Disability Claims Receipts* (Strategy).

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-07-10-10162.pdf>

The Social Security Administration's Strategy for Reducing the Initial Claims Backlog ***A-07-10-10162***

Our Findings

We evaluated SSA's ability to reduce the initial disability claims pending level to 525,000 by FY 2014. Based on SSA's projection for initial claims receipts, work years, and productivity, it appears that it will meet the goal by FY 2014, if not sooner.

SSA's ability to reach its goal is dependent upon SSA receiving funding that will enable it to achieve projections for work years and productivity. However, in FY 2011, funding is already a concern. With a FY 2011 budget nearly \$1 billion below the amount requested, Agency components and State disability determination services are under a full hiring freeze. Without the ability to replace employees lost through attrition, SSA will not be able to maintain the projected level of work years through 2014. Therefore, SSA will be in jeopardy of not achieving its goal.

We also found that the Strategy is not transparent regarding how SSA will balance its resources between initial claims, reconsiderations, and continuing disability review (CDR) workloads, and how the CDR and reconsideration workloads will be affected by SSA's actions to achieve its goal for initial disability claims pending.

Our Recommendations

We recommended that as the Strategy is reassessed each year, SSA be transparent as to how workload decisions are developed, including how budgetary constraints affect initial claim, CDR, and reconsideration workloads.

SSA disagreed with our recommendation. SSA stated that it did not discuss CDR workloads at length in the Strategy because it focused on initial claims.

Given the current budget and hiring situation, we continue to have concerns with how staff will balance time between the various workloads and how current and future budgetary constraints will affect these workloads. Therefore, we continue to support our recommendation that this information should be included in SSA's annual reassessment of the Strategy.