

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

May 2011



Objective

To determine whether the California Disability Determination Services (CA-DDS) (1) incorrectly denied initial claims based on failure to cooperate (FTC) and (2) understated the size and age of its initial claims backlog.

Background

To receive disability benefits, an individual must cooperate with a disability determination services (DDS) in obtaining and identifying evidence about their impairment. When an individual fails to cooperate, a DDS will make a decision based on the available information.

At a 2009 hearing, Congressman Bob Filner testified that CA-DDS may have been improperly denying disability applicants based on FTC and may have been concealing its backlog of initial claims.

Subsequently, the Commissioner requested that we conduct this review.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-09-10-21093.pdf>

Failure to Cooperate Denials and Initial Claims Backlog at the California Disability Determination Services (A-09-10-21093)

Our Findings

CA-DDS did not always comply with the Social Security Administration's (SSA) policies and procedures for FTC denials. Our review of 150 FTC denials found that 37 (24.7 percent) did not comply with SSA's policies and procedures. Specifically, CA-DDS did not

- evaluate and follow up on medical evidence submitted for 18 claimants;
- request evidence, when required, for 7 claimants; and
- contact third parties for 12 claimants who required special assistance because of mental impairments.

Our review found no evidence that the inappropriate denials occurred because of employee furloughs or that CA-DDS understated the size and age of its initial claims backlog. Finally, we found that CA-DDS branch offices had inconsistent interpretations of the FTC policy.

Our Recommendations

We recommended that SSA:

1. Ensure CA-DDS takes corrective action, as appropriate, for the 37 claimants identified by our audit.
2. Based on the results of the corrective action for the 37 claimants, determine whether it should review the population of 6,654 FTC denials.
3. Determine whether additional revisions to FTC policies and procedures are necessary.
4. Require that CA-DDS provide training for its employees on the FTC policies and procedures.

SSA agreed with all our recommendations.