

Summary of Termination of Disability Benefits Following a Continuing Disability Review Cessation Determination

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Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) timely terminated benefits following a continuing disability review (CDR) cessation determination.

Background

Once an individual begins receiving disability benefits under the Disability Insurance (DI) or the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, SSA ensures only those who remain disabled will continue receiving benefits. SSA conducts CDRs on DI beneficiaries and SSI recipients to determine whether they remain medically eligible for disability payments. A decision to discontinue benefits is made when a CDR reveals the individual no longer meets the medical requirements of disability benefits, referred to as medical cessation determinations. SSA should inform the individual of its decision and discontinue payments 2 months after the cessation determination.

Our Findings

We identified populations of 25,564 DI beneficiaries and 67,943 SSI recipients who received medical cessation determinations during Calendar Years 2005 through 2010 but continued to receive monthly benefit payments more than 2 months after the medical cessation determination. Of 250 DI beneficiaries sampled, we found 30 percent improperly received benefit payments of approximately \$48.9 million because payments were not terminated timely. Of 250 SSI recipients sampled, 16 percent improperly received \$34.7 million because payments were not terminated timely.

These improper payments occurred, in part, because SSA lacked adequate controls and did not have automated systems for processing medical cessation determinations. SSA employees were aware of the systems limitations and were to manually check cases to ensure the termination actions were accomplished. According to SSA, reduced resources and increased workloads may have prompted employees to rely on the system, rather than manually checking each case to ensure timely termination of benefits.

From November 2003 through June 2009, SSA took actions to identify DI beneficiaries and SSI recipients who continued receiving benefit payments after medical cessation determinations. However, since June 2009, SSA has not routinely identified cases where benefits were not terminated following medical cessation determinations. According to SSA, this was the result of resource limitations and other work priorities.

Our Recommendations

We recommend that SSA:

1. Enhance the ability of the processing system to perform automated terminations to ensure the timely termination of benefits following a medical cessation determination.
2. Remind employees to check cases to ensure termination actions were accomplished timely.
3. Prioritize the identification of cases where disability payments have not been terminated following medical cessation determinations to minimize improper payments.