

Objective

To assess the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review's (ODAR) use of the electronic Bench Book (eBB) to process hearing decisions.

Background

The Social Security Administration (SSA) provides Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income disability benefits to eligible individuals under Titles II and XVI of the *Social Security Act*.

In 2012, SSA piloted eBB in a limited number of sites and implemented it nationwide in 2014. The eBB is a voluntary Web-based application designed to assist users in documenting, analyzing, and making consistent and accurate decisions on hearing-level adult disability cases. It was also designed to reduce claim processing time, increase cost efficiency, and provide a more modern infrastructure.

The eBB pulls data from other Agency applications, such as case documents and bookmarks from SSA's electronic disability folder, and certain data from SSA's appeals system.

To achieve our objective, we interviewed administrative law judges and ODAR staff as well as staff responsible for developing and enhancing eBB. We also attended a demonstration of eBB.

Findings

Over the past 7 years, SSA has spent almost \$25 million to develop and implement eBB; and, at the time of our audit, SSA reported about 300 (20 percent) of the 1,500 administrative law judges (ALJ) in ODAR were using it. We were unable to determine whether eBB was meeting its goals. Additionally, during interviews, ALJs and ODAR staff reported positive and negative aspects of the tool.

The major issues that emerged from our interviews were eBB training needed to be improved, the design of eBB was not easy for users, and concerns about increased case processing time.

Recommendations

1. Assess the feedback from our audit and received directly from users.
2. Develop management information to determine whether eBB is achieving its stated goals and usage; and based on this information, re-evaluate eBB by the end of Calendar Year 2016 to determine its future uses.
3. Improve training on eBB as needed.

SSA agreed with the recommendations.