

The Social Security Administration's Listing of Impairments

A-01-15-50022



September 2015

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) efforts to update the Listing of Impairments (Listings) used to determine whether a person is disabled.

Background

SSA has a 5-step sequential process for evaluating disability for adults. This process generally follows the definition of disability in the *Social Security Act* and the regulations. SSA uses the Listings to evaluate disability claims under the Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. The Listings for each body system describe impairments that SSA considers severe enough to prevent an adult from doing any gainful activity or to cause marked and severe functional limitations in a child younger than 18-years-old.

The Listings help ensure that disability determinations are medically sound, claimants receive equal treatment based on specific criteria, and disabled individuals can be readily identified and awarded benefits, if appropriate. At step 3 of the disability process, all disability claims are screened against the Listings to identify individuals who clearly meet the definition of disability.

The Listings are organized by major body system. Altogether, SSA has over 100 listed impairments.

Findings

SSA has made progress in updating its Listings, but, because of the time it takes to develop policy, address comments, and publish regulations, some Listings have not been updated in many years and do not reflect recent medical and technological advances. Also, the use of the Listings has declined over the years. Therefore, the Listings may no longer be as effective a screening tool at step 3 of the disability adjudication process. For example, the American Psychiatric Association revised the manual used to diagnose and classify mental disorders, which it published in May 2013. However, SSA had not updated the mental medical listing since August 1985.

As of August 2015, of the 15 body systems,

- 3 were last updated between 1985 and 1993 (more than 20 years ago), but SSA expected the final revisions to be complete in 2016;
- 5 were last updated between 2002 and 2008 (between 6 and 13 years ago), but SSA is working on revisions; and
- 7 were last updated between 2009 and 2015 (within the last 5 years).

Recommendation

By the end of Fiscal Year 2020, ensure all Listings updates are less than 5-years-old and continue updating them as needed to reflect medical and technological advances.

SSA agreed with the recommendation.