

The Social Security Administration's Plan to Achieve Self-Support Program

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) management of the Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS) program and its vulnerability to misuse.

Background

PASS is a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program designed to help disabled individuals return to work. Congress intended employment support provisions, such as PASS, to provide disabled beneficiaries with the assistance needed to move from benefit dependence to independence. The *Social Security Act* allows disabled individuals to set aside income and/or resources to pay for items or services (such as tuition and transportation) to achieve a work goal under a PASS. The Agency will not count the income and resources the individual sets aside to pursue the work goal in determining their eligibility for, or amount of, SSI payments. As a result, an SSI recipient with an approved PASS may receive higher SSI payments. Disability Insurance beneficiaries may also use the PASS program to become eligible for SSI, Medicaid, and other Federal means-tested programs, such as food stamps and housing assistance.

Prior Government Accountability Office and Office of the Inspector General reports have raised concerns about SSA's management of the PASS program and its vulnerability to misuse.

Findings

SSA did not have sufficient information to evaluate the success of its PASS program. Nevertheless, we concluded the Agency was not effectively managing the program. For example, SSA lacked basic data on PASS program participation, costs, and outcomes. In addition, SSA had not evaluated the PASS program's impact on the disability rolls. Finally, SSA did not routinely monitor the PASS program or conduct quality control reviews.

Internal control weaknesses left the PASS program vulnerable to misuse. For example, PASS program guidelines were broad and vague. In addition, there were no limits on PASS benefits, such as caps on expenditures, time limits to complete work goals, or restrictions on the number of PASS work goals a disabled individual could have. Further, some individuals misused PASS benefits to obtain items or services unrelated to their work goals.

Recommendations

We recommend the Agency:

1. Collect data on PASS program participation, costs, and outcomes.
2. Evaluate the PASS program's impact on disability rolls periodically.
3. Establish routine program monitoring and quality control reviews.
4. Strengthen internal controls, such as clarifying program guidelines, limiting PASS benefits, and taking steps to reduce overpayments caused by misuse of PASS benefits.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.