

Beneficiaries Who Left the Social Security Administration's Disability Programs from 2004 Through 2013

A-04-16-50064



January 2016

Office of Audit Report Summary

Background

We are issuing this report to convey information on the number of, and reasons for, beneficiaries leaving the Social Security Administration's (SSA) disability programs from 2004 through 2013.

SSA manages two programs that provide benefits based on disability or blindness: Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The SSDI program provides monthly benefits to insured disabled or blind adults covered by workers' contributions to the Social Security trust funds. Certain family members may also be eligible for benefits from the person's earnings record. The SSI program makes monthly payments to aged, disabled, or blind individuals (including children) who have limited income and resources. Both programs have various eligibility requirements.

We reviewed SSA's annual statistics on SSDI and SSI for Calendar Years 2004 through 2013.

Summary

Beneficiaries leave the SSDI program primarily for conversion to retirement benefits, death, medical recovery, and return to work. From 2004 through 2013, SSA's SSDI statistical information showed the awards peaked in 2010 but then declined, while the number of terminations steadily increased during this period. Over the 10 years, the primary diagnoses for the beneficiaries who returned to work after receiving SSDI benefits were mental disorders, diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissues, and diseases of the nervous system and sense organs.

Children accounted for approximately 45 percent of SSDI terminations in 2004 and 36 percent in 2013. Children left SSDI primarily because they reached age 18, no longer attended school, or reached age 19 as a student.

Beneficiaries leave the SSI program primarily for excess income, death, and medical recovery. In the SSI program, there are no conversions to retirement benefits when the beneficiary attains full retirement age; the disability designation may continue although medical recovery is no longer an issue. From 2004 through 2013, SSA's SSI statistical information showed a steady increase in the total number of SSI recipients between ages 18 and 64. In 2013, over 800,000 disabled individuals' payments were terminated. Under SSI rules, payment suspension occurs primarily for financial reasons. The main reasons for suspensions were excess income, whereabouts unknown, medical recovery, and excess resources.