

# The Ticket to Work Program

## A-02-17-50203



September 2016

Office of Audit Report Summary

### Background

The *Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999* established the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program (Ticket Program). The purpose of the Ticket Program is to provide the assistance disabled beneficiaries need to return to work.

Under the Ticket Program, SSA provides beneficiaries a Ticket they can present to qualified organizations to obtain vocational rehabilitation or employment services. Eligible beneficiaries, called Ticket Holders, are age 18 through 64 and receive Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income payments based on a disability that creates an impediment to work. A beneficiary's participation in the Program is voluntary and free. The beneficiary can choose if, when, and where to use the Ticket with any approved Employment Network (EN) or State Vocational Rehabilitation agency (SVRA).

### Summary

Few Ticket-eligible beneficiaries used their Tickets to receive vocational or employment services. For example, in Fiscal Year 2015, less than 3 percent of Ticket-eligible beneficiaries assigned their Tickets or placed them in-use. Most of the individuals who used their Tickets placed them in-use with an SVRA under the cost-reimbursement (CR) option, the type of service that was in place before SSA implemented the Ticket Program.

While few beneficiaries used their Tickets, SSA incurred significant costs to operate the Ticket Program. For example, SSA paid contractors over \$234 million to help manage the Program since its inception. SSA will incur similar costs to help manage the Program in the future.

SSA reported significant savings attributed to the suspension or termination of benefit payments for beneficiaries who assigned or placed their Tickets in-use. Most savings SSA reported were attributed to beneficiaries who placed their Tickets in-use with an SVRA. However, SSA reported that beneficiaries who assigned their Tickets to ENs had higher average dollar savings than those who placed their Tickets in-use with an SVRA under the CR option.

While the savings estimates for the small percentage of beneficiaries who assign or use their tickets are encouraging, ENs decide which beneficiaries to accept. ENs may choose those more likely to return to work or to have higher earnings once they return to work. In fact, the Government Accountability Office found that an increasing number of ENs used service approaches that targeted those who were already working or ready to work. Also, an independent evaluation failed to provide strong evidence of the Ticket Program's impact on employment and concluded that many successful Program participants might have been equally successful without SSA-financed services or with services provided by an SVRA under the payment system that predated the Ticket Program.