Progress in Developing the Disability Case Processing System as of August 2017
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Objective

To evaluate the Social Security Administration's (SSA) progress in developing and implementing its Disability Case Processing System (DCPS) as of August 2017.

Background

DCPS is an SSA initiative to develop a common system for all State disability determination services (DDS), which the Agency expects will simplify system support and maintenance, improve the speed and quality of the disability process, and reduce the overall growth rate of infrastructure costs.

SSA is using an Agile approach to developing DCPS. The Agency continually identifies functional requirements, which are expressed as user stories. Each user story is assigned a level of effort, called a story point. Velocity refers to the number of story points completed during an iteration, or "sprint." User stories that need to be addressed are considered the backlog.

In December 2016, SSA released its first working software to three DDSs, enabling them to process certain types of disability claims. Since the December 2016 DCPS release, SSA has deployed two more major releases that provided additional functionality.

Results

As of August 28, 2017, 9 DDSs had used DCPS to process 1,665 disability claims. To ensure the new functionality in the latest release was working as intended, SSA asked participating DDSs to limit the number of cases processed in the system. DDS staff we interviewed were pleased with the progress and were looking forward to DCPS having full functionality.

As of the end of August 2017, SSA's cumulative costs for the new DCPS project were about $64.8 million. This total does not include the costs SSA spent to develop the prior version of DCPS.

While SSA made progress in completing user stories, the universe of story points continued to grow. As expected in an Agile environment, SSA continually updates the backlog of user stories. Therefore, it is difficult to predict how many user stories SSA will identify in the future. In addition, as SSA's velocity has varied considerably since it began developing DCPS, we cannot predict what velocity SSA will achieve in the future.

DCPS must interface with State-managed fiscal systems. In July 2017, SSA considered the fiscal requirements to represent a high risk to the project. Given the complexity of State-specific functionality, it is imperative that SSA carefully plan for and manage this component of DCPS.

Conclusion

SSA's goals are to deliver functionality to support all initial and reconsideration cases by January 2018 and all remaining workloads—including continuing disability reviews and DDS disability hearings—by April 2018. However, the Agency had not yet identified all the user stories associated with providing that functionality.

SSA's ability to meet its delivery goals will depend on the velocity with which it completes the backlog of story points identified to-date as well as the volume of work it has not yet identified. Given the uncertainty with regard to the future growth of the backlog and SSA's ongoing development velocity, we were unable to conclude whether the Agency's release goals were reasonable.