

Oversight of Medical Examinations for Disability Claims

012313



July 2024

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) and disability determination services (DDS) conducted consultative examination (CE) oversight reviews, as required, and whether they took corrective actions based on the results of the CE oversight reviews completed.

Background

A CE is a physical or mental examination or test purchased from a medical source, at SSA's request and expense, to provide evidence for a claimant's disability or blindness claim. Generally, SSA will not request a CE until it makes every reasonable effort to obtain evidence from the claimant's medical sources.

Each DDS oversees its CE process and ensures the process' accuracy, integrity, and economy. Every year, each DDS submits an Annual CE Oversight Report to SSA's Office of Disability Determinations. In addition to the DDS Annual CE Oversight Report, each SSA regional office submits an Annual CE Oversight Report.

According to SSA policy, before the DDS uses any CE provider, it must verify the provider's medical licenses.

Although it is not required by policy, SSA suggests DDSs consider routinely surveying claimants who had a CE. We selected a sample of 50 CE providers to determine whether they had an active medical license in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022.

Results

Generally, SSA and the DDS conducted the required CE oversight reviews and took corrective actions based on the reviews' findings. Based on our review of the 52 DDS Annual CE Oversight Reports completed for FY 2022:

- 41 (78.8 percent) reported all the required information, and
- 11 (21.2 percent) did not report all the required information, but we found the information for 7 by reviewing the FY 2021 and 2023 reports. For the remaining four DDSs, SSA provided us the information in May 2024.

Additionally, our sampling showed all 50 CE providers had active licenses in FY 2022.

As a result of the DDS and SSA oversight of the CE process, DDSs stopped using some CE providers in FY 2022 for various reasons. Overall, 15 DDSs removed 47 CE providers from its list of approved providers: 44 were removed for cause, and 3 were removed because of inactive licenses.

Although SSA policy does not require that DDSs survey claimants who had to attend a CE, most SSA regions encourage their DDSs to conduct claimant surveys. Additionally, for the most part, DDSs perform the quality assurance reviews SSA suggests they perform.

SSA and the DDSs have oversight processes in place and generally follow those required processes to minimize integrity issues with the CE process. Also, some DDSs follow the suggested (but not required) oversight procedures.