



Office of the Inspector General

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Press Release

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Disability Determination Service's 21 Percent Productivity Decrease and 81 Percent Increase in Processing Times Coincided with the Loss of Key Technical Staff

Processing times of 121 days in Fiscal Year 2019 went to 219 days in Fiscal Year 2023 and a 15-percent reduction in Disability Determinations from 2.2 went to 1.9 million during the same period

From FY 2019 to FY 2023, Disability Determinations Services (DDS) productivity, measured as *Production Per Work Year*, decreased by 21 percent, and average processing time increased by 81 percent from 121 to 219 days. The lower productivity and increase in processing times coincided with the loss of key technical staff, including disability examiners who evaluate disability claims and make disability determinations in accordance with laws, regulations, policies, and procedures governing Social Security Administration (SSA) disability programs.

FY	Experienced Examiners	Medical Consultants	Hearing Officers
2019	6,266	2,370	415
2020	6,183	2,237	362
2021	5,981	2,137	333
2022	5,804	2,028	317
2023	5,594	2,071	293
Percent Change FYs 19 - 23	-11%	-13%	-29%
2024	6,072	1,994	281

The lower productivity and increase in processing times resulted in a 15-percent reduction in disability determinations, from 2.2 to 1.9 million and a 96-percent increase in the number of pending determinations.

FY	Average Processing Time (Days)	Claims Received	Disability Determinations Cleared	Disability Determinations Pending	PPWY
2019	121	2,280,118	2,249,994	572,663	302.8
2020	132	2,130,534	1,979,377	719,069	255.2
2021	166	1,917,703	1,922,034	693,660	238.6
2022	184	2,070,029	1,802,758	903,408	229.8
2023	219	2,162,203	1,916,375	1,124,929	240.2
Percent Change FYs 19 - 23	+81%	-5%	-15%	+96%	-21%
2024	238	2,294,578	2,206,150	1,175,970	245.7

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The rate DDS full-time disability examiners separated each FY, measured as attrition rate, ranged from 13 to 25 percent, for an average of 19 percent. The overall average attrition rate for total DDS staff during this time was 13 percent. The complexity of the disability examiner position makes losing experienced staff detrimental to a DDS as it results in a significant loss of institutional knowledge.

FY	Total Staff Attrition Rate	Examiner Attrition Rate
2019	11%	15%
2020	10%	13%
2021	14%	20%
2022	18%	25%
2023	14%	20%
Average, FY 19 - 23	13%	19%
2024	11%	16%

When a claimant meets the non-disability criteria to be eligible for Social Security or Supplemental Security Income disability benefits, SSA forwards the claim to the DDS with jurisdiction to develop medical evidence and determine whether a claimant is disabled or blind under the law. There are DDSs in each of the 50 states; the District of Columbia; and Puerto Rico. DDSs are state-run, and the Government provides funding through SSA to support their operations. Therefore, DDS employees are not SSA employees. States provide DDSs with sufficient qualified personnel to ensure disability determinations are made accurately and promptly, while SSA provides the funding to cover DDS costs, including staff salaries, office expenses, and other operational expenses.

The 10 states with the highest average processing time for initial disability claims during FY 2019 through 2023, ranging from 189.8 to 216.5 days, included:

DDS	Average Processing Time for Initial Disability Claims (Days) FYs 2019 through FY 2023
Alaska	216.5
Delaware	211.7
South Carolina	208.6
Tennessee	208.2
Georgia	206.5
Maryland	199.9
New Mexico	196.1
Nevada	195.6
Florida	190.1
Illinois	189.8

SSA's ability to address DDS staffing levels and productivity issues is limited by the complexities of the Federal-state relationship and historical budget constraints. SSA and DDS management have attempted to work within these limitations to develop such initiatives as offering workload assistance, streamlining procedures, and creating a recruitment and retention workgroup to share best practices across all DDSs. Despite these efforts, DDSs struggled with achieving staffing levels needed to prevent reduced productivity and increased processing times.

Read the full report [here](#).

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