
**OFFICE OF
THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

**THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S
IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIAL
DISABILITY WORKLOAD CASES**

January 2006

A-13-05-15028

**EVALUATION
REPORT**



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SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 24, 2006

Refer To:

To: The Commissioner

From: Inspector General

Subject: The Social Security Administration's Identification of Special Disability Workload Cases (A-13-05-15028)

OBJECTIVE

Our objectives were to determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) had (1) identified and taken actions to implement system enhancements to prevent future Special Disability Workload (SDW) cases and (2) identified the universe of SDW cases.

BACKGROUND

SSA administers the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs under Titles II and XVI of the Social Security Act. The SSI program provides payments to individuals who have limited income and resources and who are either age 65 or older, blind or disabled.^{1, 2} The OASDI program provides benefits to qualified retired and disabled workers and their dependents as well as to survivors of insured workers.³

Based on Section 1611(e)(2) of the Social Security Act, SSI recipients who have been identified as eligible for OASDI benefits are required to file for those benefits. When SSA identifies an SSI recipient who may be eligible for OASDI benefits, SSA notifies the individual of his or her eligibility and the requirement to file for OASDI benefits.

¹ To be eligible for SSI payments, the individual must also (1) be a U.S. resident; (2) be a U.S. citizen or an eligible noncitizen; and (3) meet certain income and resource limits.

² Section 1601, et seq. of the Social Security Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. § 1381, et seq.). See also 20 CFR 416.110.

³ Social Security Act § 201 et seq., 42 U.S.C. § 402 et seq.

Studies SSA conducted in July 1999 identified approximately 130,000 SSI recipients who appeared, based on their earnings, to be insured⁴ for benefits under the OASDI program. However, at that time, the SSI recipients were not receiving OASDI benefits. Subsequent studies in 2002 identified additional SSI recipients who appeared to be eligible for OASDI benefits but were not receiving them. While some of the individuals identified in July 1999 had claims dating back to 1973, SSA estimated the SSI recipients who were determined to be eligible for OASDI benefits had been eligible for an average of about 8 years. As of November 2004, there were approximately 466,000 cases of SSI recipients identified as possibly being insured for benefits under the OASDI program (see Appendix C). The Agency categorized these individuals as SDW cases.

In each of SSA's 10 regions, specialized cadres of technical experts worked with field offices, Federal/State Disability Determination Services, program service centers and SSA's Office of Central Operations to review and assess some of the SDW cases (see Appendix D). The Agency advised us 127,287 cases were completed through September 2005. The Agency reported that, as of November 23, 2005, the cadres had completed 87,897 cases. We did not verify these totals.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

While SSA has undertaken several studies to identify all SSI recipients who appear to be insured for OASDI benefits, it has identified additional groups of cases with potential OASDI entitlement not included in the universe of SDW cases. Further, the Agency has implemented system enhancements to assist with processing SDW claimant cases. However, failure to identify potential OASDI eligibility factors and programming weaknesses limited the Agency's ability to identify SSI recipients who may have been eligible for OASDI benefits.

SSA HAS TAKEN ACTIONS TO IDENTIFY SDW CASES

SSA has taken actions to identify SSI recipients who appear to be insured for OASDI benefits based on their own earnings but not receiving such benefits.

Identification of SDW Cases In July 1999, the Agency identified approximately 130,000 SSI recipients who, based on their earnings, appeared to be insured for, but were not receiving, OASDI benefits. In February 2003, SSA organized a workgroup comprised of various program and information systems technical experts. The workgroup quantified the potential impact of SDW on the Agency's programs and operations. Led by the Agency's Office of Operations, the

⁴ SSA, Program Operations Manual System (POMS), RS 00301.101, states insured status is the earnings requirement a numberholder must meet to establish entitlement to any type of benefit or a period of disability based on his or her earnings record. To meet insured status, the numberholder must have the required number of earnings credits, called quarters of coverage, on his or her earnings record.

workgroup used SSA's information systems to identify SDW cases, determined the need to clarify the Agency's SSI policies, and developed SDW case selection criteria (see Appendix C).

The workgroup provided the Office of Systems the SDW case selection criteria. Using these criteria, the Office of Systems modified the Agency's information systems to identify potential SDW cases. As potential SDW cases were detected, SSA's systems annotated Quarter of Coverage indicators (codes) on SSI recipients' Supplemental Security Records (SSR). The Quarter of Coverage codes indicated potential OASDI insured status. As of April 2004, the Agency had applied several case selection criteria. In Fiscal Year 2005, the Agency had plans to apply additional case selection criteria to identify more SDW cases. On average, each SDW case selection criteria application takes about 6 months to develop, apply, and validate.

As a result of these efforts, the Agency identified claimants who were added to the list of SDW cases. The workload grew from about 130,000 cases to nearly 466,000 cases (an increase of about 350 percent). In addition, SSA identified cost estimates of this workload's impact on Agency operations and programs.⁵

We were unable to recreate the actions the Agency took to identify the population of SDW cases because some of the program source codes were not available. SSA management explained the source codes were developed in a decentralized manner, and not all codes were retained. Additionally, the population of SSRs had changed since the original SDW cases were identified. Therefore, we were unable to independently determine whether the approximately 466,000 SDW cases (as of November 2004) represented the total number of SSI recipients who appeared to be insured for OASDI benefits.

The Agency has defined the SDW workload as a discrete group of cases with SSI entitlement based on applications before January 1, 2000 and with apparent sufficient earnings established on the individual's own earnings record for OASDI entitlement but for which entitlement has not been established.

In July 2005, SSA informed us that there were some additional categories of cases involving potential entitlement to OASDI benefits. However, these cases did not meet the Agency's definition of SDW. As such, the Agency had not included these additional categories in the universe of SDW cases. SSA stated it had activities in place to identify and review such cases. When SSA reviews these additional categories, some of these cases may be entitled to OASDI benefits.

⁵ During a March 4, 2003 hearing before the House of Representatives' Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, the Commissioner of Social Security stated \$142 million of the Agency's Fiscal Year 2004 budget was allocated to process SDW cases. The actual programmatic costs associated with SDW are reported in the Agency's annual Performance and Accountability Report.

SSA LEVERAGED TECHNOLOGY TO ASSIST IN PROCESSING SDW CASES

To assist field office staff in making accurate determinations⁶ for SDW cases, SSA developed new software and tools and used existing systems. These enhancements assist in processing initial SSI disability claims. SSA also updated its disability case processing policies and procedures to provide direction for handling SDW cases.

Agency management stated that many of the disability claims it processes involve complicated issues. For example, disability claims can involve a claimant's insured status, work issues, prior filings of disability claims, and benefit entitlement dates.

These issues are also found in SDW claimant cases. The Agency reports SDW cases are complex because of the significant amount of time that may have elapsed from the date of the initial filing of the disability claim until the date the Agency made a decision about the SSI recipients' eligibility for OASDI benefits.

System Enhancements for Processing SDW Claimant Cases SSA modified and used existing systems to process SDW claimant cases. These systems assist SSA employees in making accurate determinations concerning the insured status, work issues, prior filings, and entitlement dates for disability claims, including SDW cases. Specifically, the Agency used the Disability Insured Status Calculator Online,⁷ Disability Wizard,⁸ and Modernized Return to Work Program⁹ software.

Additionally, system enhancements were developed to provide ready access to SSA's Master Earnings File. This access allows SSA staff to make an informal determination of insured status for disability claims. Moreover, the SSI diary system¹⁰ was enhanced to ensure alerts are issued when SSI recipients have earnings. SSA management stated that many of the cases identified as SDW cases are complex and require careful screening and diligent review. As a result, the Agency updated its disability claim processing policies and procedures. For example, the Agency revised its automated

⁶ SSA Handbook § 2189 states an initial determination is the first decision made on an application, post-eligibility event, or a periodic redetermination of eligibility. An initial determination generally involves eligibility for, or the amount of, SSI payments.

⁷ The Disability Insured Status Calculator Online, also known as DISCO, is used to determine disability insured status for entitlement to OASDI benefits.

⁸ The Disability Wizard, also known as DIBwiz, is a software application developed to assist SSA employees in making complex decisions about insured status.

⁹ The Modernized Return to Work Program, also known as MRTW, is a Microsoft Access database program designed to assist with "post-entitlement work continuing disability reviews."

¹⁰ SSA, POMS, SM 01301.200, states the diary system is designed to ensure individuals' records are current and accurate. Diaries are established as a result of field office input, internal and external interfaces, or systems runs. They are used to note that further action is needed.

SDW Processing Guide. This Guide includes instructions for processing SDW cases, such as steps personnel should follow to conduct a pre-interview screening. Additionally, in April 2002, the Agency implemented SDW refresher training.

Also, to assist in managing SDW cases, SSA created an SDW website. The website contains claimant case control management information and SDW reference materials. For example, information is provided on the website on using SSI disability decisions to establish entitlement for OASDI benefits. Additionally, SSA staff stated the SDW website automatically interfaces with the "800 number system" and the Modernized Claim System, which produces an alert that SDW development needs to be completed. Also, the website tracks the status of SDW cases. SSA personnel can access and update information on the website.

SSA HAD NOT FULLY MODIFIED ITS SYSTEMS TO PREVENT FUTURE SDW CASES

Office of Management and Budget Circular A-123, *Management Accountability and Control*, states agencies must take systematic and proactive measures to develop and implement appropriate, cost-effective management controls. Management controls (internal controls) are policies and procedures used to reasonably ensure reliable and timely information is obtained, maintained, reported and used for decisionmaking. In addition, management controls are policies and procedures used to reasonably ensure programs achieve their intended results.

Diary Did Not Identify Certain OASDI Eligibility Factors and Had Programming Weaknesses Failure to identify certain OASDI eligibility factors and programming weaknesses limited the effectiveness of the systems¹¹ that alert field offices an SSI recipient may be potentially eligible for OASDI benefits. To help Agency personnel identify these individuals, SSA's systems are programmed to annotate a KZ diary on the SSR. The presence of a KZ diary on the SSR is notification to SSA staff of a need to determine whether the SSI recipient is eligible for OASDI benefits.

Despite the number of SDW cases SSA identified, Agency management stated the systems that result in the annotation of a KZ diary on the SSR were working as they were initially programmed. However, SSA acknowledged the systems were not designed to identify certain potential OASDI eligibility factors and had programming

¹¹ There are several systems involved in the annual process which identifies SSI recipients who are potentially insured for OASDI benefits. These systems include the annual Quarters of Coverage selection, the Informational/Certified Earnings Records System, and the monthly redetermination process.

weaknesses. In 2002, the Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment (OQA) reported the “. . . system did not select a case if it showed no current earnings on the SSR...” or “...auxiliary/survivor title II beneficiaries....” Further, OQA indicated “...the software does not select records showing pending action on a title II claim, and continues to generate false alerts....”

In addition, Agency regional staff reported SDW “...has shown that the KZ diary process failed to identify many SSI recipients who were insured.” In the April 2004 *Special Disability Workload Processing Guide*, SSA reported (1) the “redetermination merge run selections”¹² that occur every September failed to set KZ diary alerts to warn field office personnel of an SSI recipient’s insured status, and (2) subsequent earnings resulting in insured status did not generate the KZ diary. Also, during the redetermination process, field office personnel did not routinely assess OASDI insured status even though SSI recipients had earnings on their Master Earnings Files.

To ensure SSA identifies categories of potential entitlement cases, appropriate steps need to be taken to identify SSI recipients who appear to be potentially insured for OASDI benefits. SSA management stated the Agency plans to improve the systems that alert field offices that a recipient is potentially insured for OASDI benefits by proposing additional system enhancements for processing disability claims. These proposals have been submitted to the Agency’s Information Technology Advisory Board for review and approval. According to the Board’s Plan for FYs 2005 through 2006, system enhancements will be made to the SSI process to help prevent future potential entitlement cases. As of March 2004, the Agency reported its processing of SDW cases was not expected to be completed until 2010.

¹² In the 2004 Annual Report of the SSI Program, SSA states redeterminations are reviews of the non-medical factors of eligibility to determine whether a recipient remains eligible for SSI payments and continues to receive the correct payment amount.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While SSA has taken actions to identify SSI recipients who appeared to be insured for OASDI benefit payments, it has identified additional groups of cases with potential OASDI entitlement not included in the universe of SDW cases. Further, the Agency has implemented system enhancements to assist with the processing of SDW cases. However, failure to identify potential OASDI eligibility factors and programming weaknesses limited the effectiveness of SSA's systems designed to identify SSI recipients who may potentially be eligible for OASDI benefits. To prevent future potential entitlement cases, SSA must continue to take actions to identify SSI recipients who appear likely to be insured for OASDI benefits.

We recommend SSA:

1. Ensure enhancements to systems that identify SSI recipients who may potentially be eligible for OASDI benefits are made a top priority and implemented timely.
2. Continue to process SDW cases, and pay OASDI benefits for those SDW cases determined to be eligible for benefit payments.

AGENCY COMMENTS

The Agency agreed with our recommendations. The full text of the Agency's comments is included in Appendix E.



Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.

Appendices

[APPENDIX A](#) – Acronyms

[APPENDIX B](#) – Scope and Methodology

[APPENDIX C](#) – Universe of Special Disability Workload Cases as of November 2004

[APPENDIX D](#) – Processing the Special Disability Workload

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Acronyms

C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations
OASDI	Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance
OIG	Office of the Inspector General
OQA	Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment
POMS	Program Operations Manual System
QCI	Quarters of Coverage Indicator
SDW	Special Disability Workload
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SSR	Supplemental Security Record
U.S.C.	United States Code

Scope and Methodology

To accomplish our objectives, we:

- Reviewed the applicable sections of the Social Security Act¹ and the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Special Disability Workload (SDW) National Website.²
- Interviewed SSA personnel to obtain an understanding of the policies and procedures for identifying SDW cases.
- Obtained from SSA's National Database a listing of all SDW cases posted to the National Website as of September 2004.

The entities reviewed were the Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment under the Deputy Commissioner for Finance, Assessment and Management; the Offices of Public Service and Operations Support, and Automation Support under the Deputy Commissioner for Operations; and the Office of Disability and Supplemental Security Income Systems under the Deputy Commissioner for Systems. We performed our review from August 2004 through November 2005 in Baltimore, Maryland. We conducted our review in accordance with the *Quality Standards for Inspections* issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency.

¹ Section 201 et seq., (42 U.S.C. § et seq.), Section 1611 (e)(2) and Section 1601, et seq. of the Social Security Act, as amended (42 U.S.C. § 1381, et seq.).

² <http://phapps.ph.ssa.gov/specdib2/specdibgreet.asp>

Universe of Special Disability Workload Cases as of November 2004

Based on various Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) eligibility requirements, a listing of Special Disability Workload (SDW) cases was identified and posted to the Agency's website. The Office of Systems annotated a special Quarters of Coverage Indicator (QCI) code on selected Supplemental Security Records. The Office of Systems reported the following.

QCI Codes	Description	Potential SDW Cases	Date of System Run
Z	Original workload of SDW cases identified in July 1999.	130,460	July 1999
H	Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicants/recipients who are receiving auxiliary or survivor OASDI benefit payments and are potentially entitled to higher OASDI benefits.	14,634	August 2002
D	SSI applicants/recipients potentially insured with higher OASDI benefits.	59,284	September 2002
P	Cases with processing limitations in the normal insured status screening process.	16,074	October 2002
M	SSI recipients entitled to reduced retirement insurance benefit payments but appear to be eligible for non-reduced disability insurance benefits.	12,932	April 2004
T ¹	Individuals who once received SSI payments but whose SSI records are likely in a terminated status.	188,280	See footnote 1
	Subtotal	421,664	
Additional cases with Special QCI Codes Identified (Not Listed on Website)			
KZ Diary	SDW cases identified in January 2002 KZ diary clean up run.	43,537	January 2002
A	SSI applicants insured for retirement insurance benefit payments.	493	September 2002
	Total	465,694	

¹ In 2002, the Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment identified this category as terminated cases. However, the Office of Systems has not generated a system "run" for this category. The Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment stated that the estimated time frame to process these cases is Fiscal Year 2009.

Processing the Special Disability Workload

Specialized cadres of technical experts in each region work with field offices, Federal/State Disability Determination Services, program service centers and the Office of Central Operations to process Special Disability Workload (SDW) cases. These cadres review records for each affected Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient to determine when the person first became eligible for Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) benefits. These experts calculate the amount of benefit payments individuals should have received and the amount of SSI payments these individuals should not have received.

To accomplish this task, technical experts work with other Agency components to

1. screen the case to ensure the individual is insured and meets the criteria for SDW,
2. map the case for field office jurisdiction,
3. interview the claimant,
4. develop the case,
5. conduct pre-Disability Determination Service effectuation reviews,¹
6. send cases to the Disability Determination Services,
7. prepare awards and denials,
8. conduct pre-payment reviews,
9. adjudicate awards and denials, including SDW reconsiderations,²
10. conduct payment effectuation,
11. calculate the windfall offset,³ and
12. effectuate the windfall offset.

The Social Security Administration reports the average length of time to process an SDW case is approximately 10 months. As of March 2004, the Agency reported its processing of SDW cases was not expected to be completed until 2010.

¹ *Special Disability Workload Processing Guide*, January 2005, defines pre-effectuation reviews as an application taken and developed then submitted for a technical review. Should the case require a pre-payment review, the same review is applied.

² SSA Handbook § 2004 states in SSI cases, reconsideration is a case review, an informal conference, a formal conference, or a disability hearing.

³ SSA Handbook § 2185 states that the windfall offset affects individuals and couples eligible for SSI. It applies to people due both SSI and OASDI benefits. The windfall offset prevents a person from receiving more benefits retroactively than would have been received if all benefits were paid in the months they were due.

Agency Comments



SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

34212-24-1299

Date: January 9, 2006

Refer To: S1J-3

To: Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General

From: Larry W. Dye *Larry W. Dye*
Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Draft Evaluation Report "The Social Security Administration's Identification of Special Disability Workload Cases" (A-13-05-15028) -- INFORMATION

We appreciate OIG's efforts in conducting this review. Our comments on the draft report content and recommendations are attached.

Let me know if we can be of further assistance. Staff inquiries may be directed to Candace Skurnik, Director, Audit Management and Liaison Staff, on extension 54636.

Attachment:
SSA Response

COMMENTS ON THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG) DRAFT REPORT "THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION'S IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIAL DISABILITY WORKLOAD CASES" (A-13-05-15028)

We agree with the findings and recommendations in the report. Our specific responses to the report's recommendations are provided below.

Recommendation 1

Ensure enhancements to systems which identify SSI recipients who may potentially be eligible for OASDI benefits are made a top priority and implemented timely.

Response

We agree. Within the Agency's Information Technology Advisory Board (ITAB) determination process for this systems modification, IT solutions were deemed critical. This garnered approval to devote systems resources to this effort. The sponsor of the project further prioritized this activity within the list of its approved ITAB projects. Moreover, SSA's Deputy Commissioner for Systems has identified the project as an Executive Oversight project. This ensures the project receives heightened attention among SSA's executives with more frequent reporting on its status. During FY 2006, changes will be made in the SSI Initial Claim and Redetermination processes, both to automatically identify SSI recipients who are potentially eligible for OASDI benefits and to provide space on existing MSSICS screens to document the disposition of the potential eligibility.

Recommendation 2

Continue to process SDW cases and pay OASDI benefits for those SDW cases determined to be eligible for benefit payments.

Response

We agree. The Agency has undertaken measures to identify all possible SDW cases and remains committed to paying all benefits due.

OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

OIG Contacts

Shirley E. Todd, Director, General Management Audit Division (410) 966-9365

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Acknowledgments

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Social Security Advisory Board

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