

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

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Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Electronic Claims Analysis Tool (eCAT) as it was being rolled out nationally to sites that make initial disability determinations.

Background

eCAT is a Web-based application designed to document the analysis made by a disability adjudicator and ensure all relevant Agency policies are considered during the disability adjudication process.

In December 2009, SSA's Commissioner announced eCAT's national rollout to all Disability Determination Services (DDS) and SSA Federal units that process initial disability claims.

As of September 2010, SSA had implemented eCAT in 37 sites. The Agency expects to complete the rollout in May 2011.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-01-10-11010.pdf>

The Social Security Administration's Electronic Claims Analysis Tool (A-01-10-11010)

Our Findings

Our review found that SSA's eCAT application is generally a useful tool in documenting the analysis of initial disability claims. Thus far, the national rollout has generally not disrupted the sites. However, we found the need for additional eCAT training at one site.

One DDS implemented eCAT in its four offices in 2009, and SSA's eCAT team offered training to each of them. However, only one of the four offices received training from the eCAT team. Although SSA prepared and provided training material, the decision regarding how to train DDS staff was the responsibility of DDS management. Offices that had not received training from the eCAT team reported difficulties using the application. Specifically, these offices reported that most adjudicators would make the disability determination without using eCAT and then go back and fill in eCAT to reflect their decision.

SSA designed eCAT to guide the adjudicator through the adjudication process—not to be filled in after adjudication. Therefore, the untrained users were not using eCAT as intended. Because these offices were not using eCAT as designed, the Disability Determination Explanation did not always reflect the disability decision's entire rationale. Additionally, these offices believed that they spent more time adjudicating cases.

We contacted SSA's regional office, which confirmed that some offices at this DDS had not received training from the eCAT team. The Offices of Disability Programs planned to work with the Regional office and DDS to provide additional training in early 2011.

As the nationwide implementation proceeds, we encourage SSA to continue providing sufficient training resources and support to eCAT users. Additionally, eCAT training should specify that the application be used throughout the claims adjudication process.