

Use of Social Security Administration Data for Research Purposes

The Social Security Administration (SSA) maintains information about Social Security and Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries and applicants for Social Security numbers in its administrative master files. Use of these data for research purposes outside of SSA has previously been restricted to a limited number of federal agencies. SSA recently published a Privacy Act notice in the *Federal Register* to allow SSA to share certain microdata from these master files for research purposes with any federal or state agency that meets strict criteria. This new *routine use* will permit the development of richer and more comprehensive information that can be used in actuarial, epidemiological, economic, and other social science research projects. It became effective on April 13, 2004.

Types of Data Available

Information may be released under the new routine use from the following administrative files:

- **Completed Determination Record—Continuing Disability Determinations, 60-0050.** This system contains a record for every beneficiary who has ever filed for or received a Social Security or Supplemental Security Income disability benefit. This system contains the date of birth, the date the disability began, the type of claim, the reason for disability, the reason for continuance or cessation of benefits, and the date of disability termination (if any).
 - **Master Files of Social Security Number Holders and Applications, 60-0058.** This system contains a record of each individual who has applied for and obtained a Social Security number (SSN). This system contains all of the information received on the original applications for SSNs (that is, name, date and place of birth, sex, both parents' names, and race and ethnic data) and any changes in the
- information on the applications that are submitted by the SSN holders.
 - **Master Beneficiary Record, 60-0090.** The Master Beneficiary Record contains information about each claimant who has applied for retirement, survivors, or disability benefits or who is to be enrolled in the Hospital Insurance or Supplementary Medical Insurance program. This system contains the primary insurance amount, information on the insured status of the SSN holder, and data relating to the computation of benefits (military service credits, railroad retirement credits, or coverage credits earned under the Social Security system of a foreign country when the claim is based on a totalization agreement). It also includes personal information (name, date of birth, sex, date of death, date of filing, relationship to the SSN holder, entitlement to benefits on another SSN, benefit amount, and payment status) and, if applicable, information about a representative payee, disability entitlement, workers' compensation offset data, estimates and reports of earnings, or student entitlement.
 - **Supplemental Security Income Record and Special Veterans Benefits, 60-0103.** This file contains data about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) eligibility and payments. Monthly SSI benefits are paid to people with limited income and resources who are disabled, blind, or aged 65 or older. For eligible individuals, it contains basic identifying information, information on the amount that the person was eligible for, actual payment amounts, sources and amounts of other income, and information about representative payees, if applicable. It also contains limited information about spouses and parents who live with the recipient when their income and resources are relevant to the SSI eligibility determination.

This note was prepared by Dotty O'Brien, Joel Packman, and Carolyn Puckett, Data Linkage Team, Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics, Office of Policy, Social Security Administration.

Tax return information maintained by the Social Security Administration in its Master Earnings File is not covered by this new routine use provision. SSA's release

of this information is restricted by the Internal Revenue Code.

Criteria for Proposed Uses

Under the new routine use, disclosure may be made to a federal, state, or congressional support agency for research, evaluation, or statistical studies. To receive data the following criteria must be met:

- The disclosure does not violate legal limitations under which the record was provided, collected, or obtained.
- The proposed use
 - requires information in microdata rather than tabular format,
 - is of sufficient importance to warrant providing microdata,
 - is likely to accomplish the intended objective, and
 - is of importance to the Social Security program or Social Security beneficiaries or is for an epidemiological research project that contributes to the national health interest.
- Recipients of the information are required to
 - establish appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards to prevent unauthorized use or disclosure of the record, which may be subject to on-site inspection;
 - remove or destroy any identifying information used to create the file at the earliest time possible;
 - use the data only for statistical and research purposes; and
 - make no further use of the records except
 - (1) under emergency circumstances affecting the health or safety of any individual, following written authorization from SSA, or
 - (2) for disclosure to an SSA auditor for the purpose of auditing the research project.

These SSA data are not intended to be used to draw samples for surveys or to contact individuals, other than in situations already provided for in the regulations. SSA may refuse to extract and release data if sufficient resources are not available.

For more information about the Social Security Administration's Privacy Act Notice, see Social Security Administration, "Privacy Act of 1974, as Amended: New System of Records and New Routine Use Disclosures," *Federal Register* 49, No. 48 (March 11, 2004): 11693–11694. Available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/retrieve.html>.