

# Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018

## Fiscal Year 2025 Evaluation Plan



Securing today  
and tomorrow



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### **Selected Abbreviations**

<b>DDS</b>	Disability Determination Services
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>OASDI</b>	Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance
<b>OASI</b>	Old-Age and Survivors Insurance
<b>OCACT</b>	Office of the Chief Actuary
<b>OMB</b>	Office of Management and Budget
<b>RDRC</b>	Retirement and Disability Research Consortium
<b>SSA</b>	Social Security Administration
<b>SSAB</b>	Social Security Advisory Board
<b>SSDI</b>	Social Security Disability Insurance
<b>SSI</b>	Supplemental Security Income

# INTRODUCTION

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Evaluation Plan describes the Social Security Administration's (SSA) most significant evaluation and evidence-building activities planned for FY 2025. We define significant activities as those that are required by law, address the President's priorities, or support the goals in our [Agency Strategic Plan FYs 2022–2026](#). We identified 18 activities for this Evaluation Plan.

In addition to this Evaluation Plan, we will continue to describe our evaluation and evidence-building activities in three separate documents:

- The [Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\) Program Technical Materials Supporting Our Annual Budget](#) includes a section titled *Research and Demonstration* that describes many of our activities.
- Our FYs 2025 [Annual Performance Report](#) includes an appendix titled *Program Assessments* that describes our ongoing studies and surveys designed to assess our programs.
- The *Pilot Programs* exhibit of the [Limitation on Administrative Expenses](#) section of our annual budget request describes our pilot program evaluations.

This FY 2025 Evaluation Plan identifies the most significant activities from these three documents, and includes the additional information required by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (“Evidence Act”),<sup>1</sup> which was signed into law on January 14, 2019.

When we develop our evaluation and evidence-building activities, we consult with internal and external stakeholders. For example, our Associate Commissioner for the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics sends out an annual memo to the Deputy Commissioners from all our major offices to obtain information on their research and evaluation needs. Our Associate Commissioner for the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support holds regular meetings with representatives from our major offices to provide updates and obtain information on our demonstration projects. We also work closely with the agency's Chief Data Officer to ensure that the data for our evaluation and evidence-building activities are available and suitable for each activity. The external stakeholders that provide us with information on our research and evaluation activities include the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB), Congress, academics and practitioners who serve on the Technical Evaluation Panels we use to develop our research and demonstration projects, and the public (e.g., via listening sessions and public comment).

For each significant activity, we provide the information required in the Evidence Act and in OMB Memorandum M-19-23.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, we include: a title; a description of the key questions to be addressed by the evaluation activity or evidence-building activity; the information needed for the evaluation or study; the methods to be used; the anticipated challenges; and the dissemination strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529 (2019), available at [Text - H.R.4174 - 115th Congress \(2017-2018\): Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#).

<sup>2</sup> See Office of Mgmt. and Budget, Exec. Office of the President, [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#), *Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance*.

# EVALUATIONS AND EVIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

## Project 1 — Customer Experience Journey Transformation: Obtaining Adult Disability Benefits

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTIONS

*To what extent are our disability programs equitably serving and meeting the needs of customers seeking adult disability benefits? To what extent do changes in the application process improve customer satisfaction and equity?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The President's Management Agenda (PMA) prioritizes delivering excellent, equitable, and secure Federal services and customer experience, and the Circular A-11 Section 280 designates SSA as one of the 35 High Impact Service Providers (HISP). [Executive Order \(E.O.\) 14058: Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government](#) is a continuation of the launch of the PMA vision and directs Government leaders to put customers at the center of decision-making.

We have established an “Obtaining Adult Disability Benefits” Journey Transformation team whose mission is to improve customer trust when they do business with our agency, regardless of the service channel they choose. There is a tremendous opportunity to leverage the agency’s expansive data repositories to: analyze current trends; gain insight on customer priorities, needs, and challenges; and draw conclusions on how agency actions should pivot to support these changes and drive improvements in customer experience for obtaining adult disability benefits.

We use human-centered design activities for customer research, service design, and performance measurements to inform process changes and program improvements. Customers can expect changes to policies, business processes, and technology solutions impacting their experience when applying for initial disability benefits. Customers will experience reduced barriers to access services across our programs. We continue to identify and eliminate disparities in service that people with disabilities, workers, and their families may face when doing business with us. Recently, for one of our FY 2022-2023 [Agency Priority Goals](#), we met our target to increase Social Security Income (SSI) applications from underserved communities by 25 percent and came very close to meeting our target to increase SSI applications nationwide by 15 percent.

In FY 2024, we are improving how our customers obtain Adult Disability Benefits by:

- Collecting alternative contact information on behalf of customers early in the application process;
- Sending consistent and standardized text message and email appointment reminders;
- Improving the content, design, and usage of Adult Disability Starter Kits; and
- Developing “here’s what you need to do” video lessons to assist people through the application process.

Additionally, in FY 2024, we are working to accomplish the following service improvements:

- Reduce the number of initial disability claims pending in the Disability Determination Services in FY 2024 compared to where we ended FY 2023;
- Provide timelier service by hiring additional customer service representatives;

- Reduce claims processing time and decrease pending workloads;
- Expand our processing capacity and work towards providing more timely disability decisions by supporting recruitment and retention in our State DDSs;
- Support increased pay for DDS employees to increase the competitiveness of DDS positions; and
- Improve the onboarding and training process by working with the Office of Personnel Management.

In FY 2025, we will measure customer trust/satisfaction and equity outcomes to build understanding of how customers respond to these changes.

Overall, the project supports our [Agency Strategic Plan](#) *Strategic Goal 1: Optimize the Experience of SSA Customers*.

**Information Needed for the Study:** Our goal is to speak with SSA customers, 18 and older, who have recently or are currently going through the initial claims process for disability benefits, and individuals who have assisted someone applying for disability (e.g., a social worker or family member) to provide a breadth and depth of data for insight generation. We will focus on equity and diversity in selecting participants for this research.

We also plan to develop and implement more rigorous evaluation methods, such as surveying disability customers in the future, to measure drivers and changes in customer trust/satisfaction.

**Methods:** We collect customer feedback at various steps of the adult disability journey. We will execute a customer research plan and conduct research interviews such as one-on-one ethnographic interviews, virtual focus groups, and on-site visits to offices that provide disability services to the public. In addition, we will use an Adult Disability survey to develop an end-to-end perspective of the “Obtaining Adult Disability Benefits” journey. Customers can also provide feedback about their experiences at any moment of their journey via our “Always On” survey.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Our ability to collect and analyze data through a variety of methods is limited by the available data. Although we have data that are collected through customer and operational feedback about the disability journey, the data is not consolidated nor can it be readily correlated across different sources, leading to siloed, disparate, and gapped feedback. For example, there is no standardized logging or tracking of customer contact history across channels; therefore, we do not have structured data on customer inquiries about the disability benefit process. Findings from our FY2023 disability research will inform priorities for modernizing our data collection related to customer engagements throughout the journey. These details will be identified in our FY 2026 Evaluation Plan.

**Dissemination:** We report on “Obtaining Adult Disability Benefits” in our HISP CX action plan, provide a summary in the Annual Performance Report, and provide information on [www.performance.gov](http://www.performance.gov).

## Project 2 — Retirement and Disability Research Consortium Service Delivery Focal Area

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

Our Service Delivery Focal Area for the [Retirement and Disability Research Consortium \(RDRC\)](https://www.ssa.gov/policy/extramural/index.html) <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/extramural/index.html> identifies our interest in studies that help us identify and implement advancements in how we deliver quality, accurate, equitable, and timely service to our customers. Possible research and evaluation questions include:

1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected access to benefits and services, including potential disparities by race and ethnicity, geography, health status, disability status, limited English proficiency, income, and other factors?
2. How can SSA expand online services in a way that effectively and equitably meets the needs of our customers? To what extent, if any, are there differences for each of these questions by race and ethnicity, geography, health status, disability status, limited English proficiency, income, and other factors? For instance:
  - a. To what extent does text messaging to alert claimants to a variety of account updates, wait times, evidence needed, and/or claim status improve program access and beneficiary experience?
  - b. To what extent do customers prefer submitting forms and other evidentiary documents online rather than through other methods?
  - c. What evidence-informed features could SSA add to the [my Social Security](#) portal to benefit populations facing barriers (including SSI recipients)?
  - d. What evidence-based methods might the agency consider to equitably provide online services to the public?
3. What are the service needs of underserved communities (including rural communities, Tribal Nations, communities with limited English proficiency, among others), and are there ways that we can improve our service delivery and outreach to these populations?
4. What are successful models of benefit program administration outside the SSA context that balance the burden of proof with administrative flexibility and minimal burdens on customers?
5. How do service perceptions (e.g., satisfaction) and outcomes (e.g., wait times) vary by socioeconomic, regional, or demographic characteristics, such as race and ethnicity?

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The RDRC is an interdisciplinary extramural research program that we fund through cooperative agreements. In FYs 2019 through 2023, we funded grants through RDRC centers at [Boston College](#), [University of Michigan](#), [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#), and the [National Bureau of Economic Research](#). In FYs 2024 through 2028, we will fund grants through six centers, including new centers at the City University of New York and University of Maryland Baltimore County, as well as the four existing centers.

The RDRC has three main goals:

1. Research and evaluate a wide array of topics related to Social Security's Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and SSI programs and related federal policies;
2. Disseminate information on these topics to policymakers, researchers, stakeholder organizations, and the public; and
3. Provide training and education to scholars and practitioners in research areas relevant to these topics.

All RDRC research and activities must be relevant to one of SSA's program areas or populations. We emphasize to the centers that we would like them to consider equity in all their research. Each year, we provide the centers with [research focal areas](#) and the centers choose relevant research and evaluation questions within those areas. In FY 2023, in addition to the Service Delivery focal area, we included a focal area on Disparities by Race and Ethnicity and included a focal area on equity in FY 2024. These questions align with our [Agency Strategic Plan](#) objectives to identify and address barriers to accessing services, expand digital services, and build a customer-focused organization. The questions also align with the objectives described within *E.O. 14058 Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government* and our [Equity Action Plan](#).

**Information Needed for the Study:** The RDRC centers identify the information they need for their proposed evaluations or studies in their grant proposals. As part of the technical review of each grant proposal, we assess whether the proposed information necessary for the evaluation or study is available and whether it is appropriate for the proposed evaluation.

**Methods:** We encourage research employing a variety of approaches (e.g., qualitative, and community-engaged research, descriptive and causal studies, simulations), using innovative methods and drawing from new data sources.

**Anticipated Challenges:** The “improving service delivery” focal area is relatively new to the RDRC, and it might take RDRC researchers time to establish a research agenda on the new focal area. Research on these topics often requires using SSA program data, which external researchers are typically unable to access. Where legally permissible, SSA researchers have conducted analysis of SSA program data needed for certain studies and have created disclosable aggregated and de-identified results that RDRC researchers can use. The collaboration has been successful in that it combines the program and data expertise from our research staff with the methods expertise from the RDRC research team. Although this collaboration model may be a way to promote service delivery research among the RDRC researchers, identifying collaborators can be challenging and requires focused staff effort.

**Dissemination:** One of the main goals of the RDRC centers is to disseminate information on their research to policymakers, researchers, stakeholder organizations, and the public. The RDRC holds an annual meeting where researchers share findings with key stakeholders and receive feedback on their research. Each RDRC center has a website that contains policy briefs, working papers, and other information on its research projects. The RDRC centers publish their findings in professional journals and other outlets. We disseminate the RDRC research at work-in-progress seminars within the agency, in the *Social Security Bulletin*, and on our [website](#). We will use the RDRC research on the Service Delivery focal area to inform our efforts to deliver quality, accurate, equitable, and timely service to our customers.

## Project 3 — SSI Outreach Evaluation

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent were our recent outreach efforts for SSI effective at increasing SSI applications and awards?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** We have traditionally engaged in limited direct outreach to potentially eligible populations, focusing outreach efforts on community resources, webpages, and related mass media campaigns. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the decline in SSI participation, particularly for children, we began new SSI outreach activities, including new partnerships to identify and support potential applicants, data exchanges to directly share leads, targeted mailings to areas with low participation levels, public service announcements and paid media campaigns, and community-based outreach efforts.

Prior to recent efforts, the agency conducted several research studies to inform outreach. These studies included the SSI Outreach Demonstration in the 1990s and the Homeless Outreach Projects and Evaluation in the 2000s. The latter preceded the still-active SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) program funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. These studies generally found that many underserved individuals, particularly homeless individuals with mental health conditions, benefit from dedicated support to SSI applicants. These studies demonstrated the importance of implementing cost-effective outreach activities that yield a high number of approved applications while minimizing administrative costs.

Direct outreach is potentially hampered by information barriers. We do not have sufficient information about individuals who have not yet established contact with the agency. Moreover, potential data sources from other agencies do not have the detailed disability, income, and asset information needed to identify SSI eligibility.

We initiated several overlapping outreach activities in recent years, including, but not limited to the following:

- Vulnerable population liaisons—new positions within our Office of Operations to support third-party organizations who support SSI applications.
- Social media, public service announcements, and paid radio and television advertisements.
- Special websites and materials to help third-party organizations better understand the SSI program, such as:
  - New information added to the [Information for People Helping Others](#) website, which provides online assistance to third parties helping people apply for benefits and access services; and
  - A new [Outreach Materials for People Facing Barriers](#) resource page for groups and organizations, along with an updated Resource page for Faith and Community Partners.
- Targeted mailings to ZIP codes with low income, high percentages of the population identifying as persons of color, and large drops in SSI participation.
- Mailings to low-benefit Social Security beneficiaries informing them of the SSI program.
- Data and interagency information sharing.
- Improved online service options for SSI applicants.

The goal of these efforts is to improve awareness and understanding of and access to the OASI, DI, and SSI programs.

We conducted an evaluability assessment and identified two outreach initiatives for the evaluation. The first initiative is called Third-Party Assistance (TPA), which includes several outreach activities involving community legal aid organizations, faith-based groups, and social services organizations in cooperation with Vulnerable Population Liaisons to mitigate barriers that are hampering applications and enrollments in the SSI program. The second initiative is the Electronic SSI Protective Filing Tool (eSPF), which is a public-facing web tool that allows individuals to schedule appointments to file for SSI and records for them a protective filing date.

The topics and questions we will answer with this evaluation include, but are not limited to:

- **Program Effectiveness:** How much, if at all did each component within the TPA and eSPF increase SSI applications and approvals? Which components within the TPA and eSPF are most effective in increasing SSI applications and approvals? Which components within the TPA and eSPF are most helpful in increasing SSI applications and approvals?
- **Customer Characteristics:** Which demographic groups (e.g., sex, race, ethnicity, disability, or geographic) successfully and unsuccessfully utilized each component within the TPA and eSPF?
- **Process Assessment and Opportunities for Improvement:** How well did each component within the TPA and eSPF function, and what are the areas for improvement?
- **Barriers to Application and Process:** What barriers did SSA mitigate by the components that make up the TPA and eSPF for individuals applying for SSI?

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will need to gather information from internal and external stakeholders (such as SSI applicants and recipients, our operational and communication staff, and third parties) on SSI outreach activities, including implementation and tracking information.

**Methods:** We conducted an evaluability assessment and determined two outreach initiatives are good candidates for an evaluation. We will work with a contractor to identify the appropriate evaluation methods for this study. However, we expect the evaluation of these two initiatives will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Due to the limited funding available for the project, we will need to consider resource constraints when making decisions about the scope and methods used for the evaluation. In addition, focusing specifically on past activities introduces the potential for recall bias, thereby increasing the likelihood of inaccuracies in some collected data. There may also be challenges associated with accounting for confounding variables that were not initially considered or measured.

**Dissemination:** The evaluation results will be shared in a report or series of reports that we will make available on our [public-facing website](#). We will brief agency executives and external stakeholders and use the information gained from this evaluation to identify potential legislative, regulatory, and sub-regulatory policy changes related to outreach.

## Project 4 — Racial Equity: Improving Program Data on Race and Ethnicity

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent can we effectively improve the quality of our program data on race and ethnicity through new data efforts and statistical techniques?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** On January 20, 2021, President Biden signed [E.O. 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#). The E.O. directs agencies to examine barriers and disparities by race and ethnicity in their programs and to begin taking actions to eliminate them. However, it also recognizes: (1) many Federal datasets are not disaggregated by race, ethnicity, sex, disability, income, veteran status, or other key demographic variables, (2) this lack of data has cascading effects and impedes efforts to measure and advance equity, and (3) gathering the data needed to promote equity is a necessary first step. We have initiated an agency-wide effort to research whether we can effectively enhance our existing data on race and ethnicity to help examine where disparities and barriers may exist and need to be removed from our programs and services.

In our publication [Why Researchers Now Rely on Surveys for Race Data on OASDI and SSI Programs: A Comparison of Four Major Surveys \(ssa.gov\)](#), we describe the limitations with our existing race and ethnicity data. We are working to improve our race and ethnicity data in three ways: (1) providing opportunities for the public to voluntarily disclose their race and ethnicity (e.g., when requesting a new or replacement card), (2) exploring options for data exchanges, and (3) exploring statistical methods for imputation. This work is part of our [Equity Action Plan](#), and includes developing metrics for assessing the reliability and quality of our existing data, as well as researching the use of statistical methods for imputing race and ethnicity where needed.

Our efforts to explore statistical methods to impute race and ethnicity are for research and statistical purposes only. In FY 2022, we began exploring techniques for enhancing race and ethnicity data on the following race and ethnicity groups: White, Black, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Hispanic. We seek to assess the alignment between race and ethnicity estimated by the imputation method and the individual's self-reported race and ethnicity. In FY 2023, we continued to explore techniques that would improve the alignment between imputations and self-reported race and ethnicity. We will continue this work in FY 2024, and by FY 2025 we expect to make a determination about the extent to which the imputations may be used for research and statistical analysis of our programs.

In FY 2023, we also conducted research on the alignment of Numident race and ethnicity data with race and ethnicity as reported in the Current Population Survey to identify strengths and limitations of using program race and ethnicity data under the existing data infrastructure. In FY 2024, we will begin work with the Census Bureau to amend the agreement to include data from our Race and Ethnicity Collection System (RECS), with the expectation that we will be able to extend the analysis to the RECS data in FY 2025. This agreement will not only help us assess the alignment of our data to the Census Bureau's data, but it will also allow us to use the Census Bureau's data to assess the racial and ethnic composition of people whose race and ethnicity are not available in our program records.

In addition to our efforts to use statistical enhancements, we will continue to pursue opportunities to access race and ethnicity data through data exchanges and provide additional opportunities for people to voluntarily report race and ethnicity to SSA.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will explore how we may use public use data (such as

publicly released Census data) and Social Security data to expand our imputation efforts. We will research statistical methods, algorithms, and techniques related to imputing race and ethnicity. We will use Census Bureau data to examine the reliability and potential biases within our program data. We will use Social Security data to assess methods to improve data collection through our enumeration process.

**Methods:** We will explore using appropriate imputation procedures to see whether we could effectively enhance the completeness and quality of our program data on race and ethnicity. For example, we will examine how well factors like age, first name, last name, geolocation, and other administrative data help us estimate individuals' race and ethnicity. We may compare imputations of race and ethnicity to the self-reported race and ethnicity to assess the effectiveness of the imputation methods, both in general and for specific groups. We will also explore other potential methods to improve or supplement the algorithms' inputs to improve accuracy.

We will use Census Bureau household survey data linked to SSA data to assess the reliability of SSA data on race and ethnicity and to assess the potential for bias due to missing race and ethnicity in SSA data. We will assess reliability by comparing the agreement rates between race and ethnicity data in SSA data and the corresponding race and ethnicity reported in the Census Bureau household survey data. We will assess bias by examining characteristics of those who do not report race and ethnicity in SSA program data to the race and ethnicity data collected in the Census Bureau household survey data. This analysis will allow us to characterize the limitations more precisely within our existing race and ethnicity data and may help use to identify efforts to improve our race and ethnicity data.

We will assess our efforts to improve race and ethnicity response rates within our enumeration process. For example, we have new online options that allow individuals to either apply for a Social Security Number (SSN) replacement card or to make an appointment to apply for an SSN card. The new online option also allows applicants to report their race and ethnicity. We will use non-experimental methods (e.g., interrupted time series) to evaluate changes in race and ethnicity reporting and use the findings to identify ways to improve race and ethnicity reporting.

**Anticipated Challenges:** First, computational processing may pose a significant challenge for future imputation exploration. As noted above and in our [Equity Action Plan](#), a second challenge is low levels of race and ethnicity data completeness for some program populations. To varying extents, our data on race and ethnicity are missing for relevant populations (e.g., applicants, beneficiaries, covered workers), especially for younger populations because we do not collect race and ethnicity when we assign an SSN through the Enumeration at Birth (EAB) process. As discussed in our Equity Action Plan, we are working with states to collect race and ethnicity data through the EAB process to address the gap in the data. Third, the effectiveness of imputation techniques varies across populations and may be less reliable for some populations, including individuals from smaller sub-groups (e.g., people who identify as American Indian or multiracial) or people who live in racially diverse communities. Fourth, data collection of newborn race and ethnicity depends upon parents' willingness to volunteer the information, as well as establishing the necessary data exchanges, forms, and systems to collect the data.

**Dissemination:** We will publish our research on our [Research, Statistics & Policy Analysis public-facing website](#). We will use the research to inform our efforts to deliver quality, accurate, equitable, and timely service to our customers, as described in our Agency Strategic Plan.

## Project 5 — Racial Equity: Disparities in Disability Programs

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What disparities and barriers to benefits exist under current SSA disability programs by race, ethnicity, sex, income, and other factors?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** [E.O. 13985 on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities](#) directs agencies to examine barriers and disparities by race and ethnicity in their programs and to begin taking actions to eliminate them. We began an agency-wide effort to examine where disparities and barriers exist in our programs and services, which is an important component of our [Equity Action Plan](#) and our [Agency Strategic Plan Strategic Objective 1.1 – Identify and Address Barriers to Accessing Services](#). This information will be critical to helping us remove those barriers.

We are conducting research on race and ethnicity disparities in disability program knowledge and program experience for disability applicants. We are analyzing data by decision steps in the disability determination process across demographic groups to help identify structural barriers that may interfere with the process. We are conducting research on potential differences in self-identified disability from survey data in the noninstitutionalized population, denied applicants, and allowed applicants. We are funding over a dozen qualitative and quantitative [RDRC studies](#) every year on disparities and barriers by race and ethnicity for people with disabilities. We are also exploring community-engaged research to shed light on barriers to our disability programs that we are not aware of, deepen our understanding of those we are aware of, and answer questions that quantitative analysis cannot address.

In FY 2024, we expect that RDRC grantees and internal staff will use multiple data sources to analyze disparities in applicants, denials, and allowances. We will analyze these disparities in more depth to better identify structural barriers while subsetting the program populations by characteristics such as impairments, education, earnings history, etc. This work will depend on how deep various data sources allow researchers to probe, depending on sample size and whether there is data on these characteristics.

In FY 2025, we will produce research from a variety of data sources. We expect to estimate disparities after controlling for age and impairment groups, and to begin isolating external factors from program rules. We also expect to fund research that will make greater use of mixed methods and incorporate community feedback to learn more about barriers discovered in earlier research.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will use a range of data sources on race and ethnicity for applicants and beneficiaries of our disability programs to identify and address systematic barriers to program participation, as described in our [Equity Action Plan](#). To examine disparities by education and income level, we will need to use SSA data matched to Census household surveys (Survey of Income and Program Participation, Current Population Survey, and possibly the American Community Survey (ACS)). To examine program knowledge and other characteristics related to health, cognition, finances, and other information, we would use the Understanding America Study (UAS). We also need to apply methodologies to measure the mechanisms for structural barriers more holistically beyond using race and ethnicity as stand-alone variables in statistical models.

**Methods:** We plan to use the latest statistical methods for quantifying disparities and structural barriers to access among those eligible by race and ethnicity, as well as metrics to determine whether disparities have changed over time. We also expect to produce research using qualitative methods and mixed methods studies, along with community participation to refine both quantitative and qualitative

studies. The barriers likely to be studied include those faced by individuals who are ineligible, individuals who are eligible but do not apply, individuals who apply but are denied, and individuals who are ultimately awarded benefits. Identifying the appropriate comparison population is a critical piece to properly quantify a disparity. Another critical methodological step is untangling whether a disparity is driven by external or programmatic barriers or a combination.

**Anticipated Challenges:** In addition to missing program data on race and ethnicity, disability program data is also limited by missing or unavailable administrative data on some applicant and beneficiary characteristics (e.g., education, marital status, household composition, other elements included in surveys). We hope that enhancing program race and ethnicity data, ongoing efforts to produce analytical disability program data, and adding the larger ACS data linked to our program data might help resolve these challenges. While matching SSA administrative data to Census surveys may provide us with more detailed information about a selection of our beneficiaries, we do not yet know whether it will be possible to produce a representative sample of SSA claimants and beneficiaries from which we will be able to make broader generalizations about our customers. Determining the barriers that drive disparities may also be difficult to do in some situations and may take iterative attempts to isolate multiple factors and the contribution of each.

**Dissemination:** We will publish our research on our [Research, Statistics & Policy Analysis public-facing website](#). We will use the research to inform our efforts to deliver quality, accurate, equitable, and timely service to our disability program customers, as described in our Agency Strategic Plan.

## Project 6 — Customer Knowledge and Preferences

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*How effective are our efforts to improve public knowledge of our programs and to meet the public's preferences for how they want to engage with us?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** We have made a concerted effort to understand our customers, inform and assist them in navigating our programs, and adjust to their preferences for service delivery. The redesign of the *Social Security Statement*, the redesign of the agency's website [ssa.gov](https://ssa.gov), and the expansion of services available in *my Social Security* are all part of this larger plan, as well as the inclusion of a priority question related to this effort in our [FYs 2022–2026 Learning Agenda](#). This project also supports the objectives within *E.O. 14058 Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government* and our [Agency Strategic Plan Strategic Objective 1.3 – Build a Customer-Focused Organization](#).

We support surveys on program knowledge and customers' preferences for communications through the [Understanding America Study](#) (UAS). Our main surveys in the UAS include the 1) [Social Security Retirement Program Knowledge survey](#), 2) [Social Security Channels Preferences survey](#), and 3) [Social Security Disability Program Knowledge survey](#). The Social Security Retirement Program Knowledge survey (also referred to as "What do People Know about Social Security") asks respondents questions that assess their knowledge of the Social Security retirement program and retirement planning more generally. The Social Security Channels Preferences survey asks respondents how they receive and/or would prefer to receive information on retirement planning from Social Security and other sources, including use of our online services. The Social Security Disability Program Knowledge survey, which was initially fielded in FY 2021, asks respondents about their views and knowledge of the Social Security disability program (and the survey also asks about experiences with the disability program for those who have previously applied for benefits).

UAS surveys are fielded on a regular basis following a rolling two-year cycle for the three surveys (retirement knowledge, channels preferences, and disability knowledge). The surveys help us track changes in program knowledge and communication preferences as respondents grow older and as we implement improvements to online services and communications. We fielded the fourth waves for both the Social Security Retirement Program Knowledge survey and Social Security Channels Preferences survey in FY 2022 and will field the fifth waves for both in FY 2024. We fielded the second wave of the Disability Program Knowledge survey in FY 2023.

With over 500 surveys completed on an internet panel that is approaching 13,000 respondents, the UAS can help us understand the public from several different angles. Surveys on health, retirement, employment, cognitive abilities, personality, financial literacy, consumer behavior, and other salient factors can be matched to a wealth of information about how people engage with our programs.

There will be an extensive set of responses on the Social Security questions that will be available for study. The respondents' personal characteristics from several other surveys will allow us to study differences in the Social Security findings from several different facets typically unavailable to other agency instruments. For example, in FY 2023, we received results from a new UAS survey on the public's initial experiences with the redesigned *Social Security Statement* and an [RDRC paper](#) using mixed methods with the UAS to study work-disabled adults who do not apply for Social Security.

In FY 2025, we expect that the agency or RDRC grantees will continue to perform analyses based on information from earlier years. Those analyses may add information from other UAS surveys about

customer service preferences and experiences that are adjacent or relevant to our customer service to provide the agency a deeper understanding of our customers' needs and preferences for our services. We expect to explore how agency efforts on outreach and improved service delivery have and will affect program knowledge and communication preferences. We would like to explore how other personal characteristics like health, personal finance, work behaviors, and other facets may provide insight into how to better serve program populations. The findings from work in earlier years may reveal barriers or opportunities to improve interactions with our program populations.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will use the UAS survey responses in the publicly available “comprehensive file” that matches respondents across several UAS surveys.

**Methods:** We will analyze results from UAS surveys on Social Security knowledge and communication preferences by race and ethnicity, with additional analysis of economic, educational, health, and other characteristics to better understand customer knowledge and communication preferences. We expect to present both descriptive statistics as well as multivariate statistical analyses, including regressions, with careful attention to choosing appropriate controls.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We expect the sample size to grow to 20,000 over the next five years, but recruiting respondents may be slower than anticipated. The larger sample size will allow us to answer questions asked of sample subsets for specific populations (e.g., Black, Hispanic, and Asian). Some of the smaller populations may still need to be aggregated into an ‘other’ category for questions asked of subsets of the population, like people who have read the *Social Security Statement* or who could not sign up for a *my Social Security* account.

**Dissemination:** We will publish our research on our [Research, Statistics & Policy Analysis public-facing website](#). The research produced using UAS data will continue to be shared with the appropriate SSA components. For example, UAS research findings on *my Social Security* have been shared with the Office of Electronic Services and Technology and findings on the redesigned *Statement* were shared with the Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs to respond to Congressional inquiries. We will also disseminate UAS findings to the Evidence Act and Customer Experience Working Groups.

## Project 7 — Ticket to Work Evaluation

### EVALUATION QUESTION

*To what extent is the Ticket to Work Program working effectively and efficiently? What evidence-based improvements can be made to reduce barriers to participation and improve outcomes?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** The Ticket to Work (Ticket) program provides SSDI beneficiaries and SSI recipients with access to employment-related services from agency-approved service providers and vocational rehabilitation agencies. We reimburse approved service providers and vocational rehabilitation agencies when the SSDI beneficiaries and SSI recipients who enroll in their services meet specified employment-related outcomes. For SSDI beneficiaries and SSI recipients, the Ticket program is a free and voluntary program that can help individuals seeking work to obtain and maintain employment and participate in job training and workforce development opportunities. We define the effectiveness of the Ticket program by the extent to which programs and services provide meaningful assistance towards meeting the goals of the program.

To meet our continuing obligations related to the Ticket program, we are conducting an evaluation focused on the experiences of the users, with an emphasis on identifying barriers to service equity. For example, ticketholders may not be accessing services due to a lack of service providers in specific geographic areas, insufficient services to meet their needs, or a mismatch between services provided and their needs. The topics and questions we intend to answer with this evaluation include, but are not limited to:

- **Program Effectiveness and Opportunities for Improvement:** To what extent is the TTW program working effectively and efficiently? What aspects of this program work effectively and what areas can be improved? What additional services or program improvements can be helpful to beneficiaries and providers? To what extent are beneficiaries aware of the programs and how does awareness vary by beneficiary characteristics? Why do beneficiaries use the TTW program? Why do beneficiaries not use the TTW program? Are there any changes to SSA's role in the TTW program that might improve service delivery and program outcomes?
- **Consumer Characteristics:** Which demographic groups (e.g., impairment, race, ethnicity, sex, SSI, SSDI, or other) and intersections of these groups are using and not using TTW services? What services are most and least effective for different demographic groups?
- **Service Provision:** How is technology integrated into TTW service delivery? Does this integration vary across service providers? Who are the effective service providers and what do they do differently from less effective service providers? How does beneficiary engagement and access vary between in-person and remote services?
- **Service Equity:** Are the Ticket services broadly available to everyone, or are there disparities between which populations have access to these services? What barriers exist, if any, to service provision, in economically disadvantaged, racially diverse, and rural communities? How do program rules, such as the **TTW** payment system, affect service availability? Are there programmatic or other disincentives to service providers in serving specific individuals (based on impairment, education, geographic location, other)?

This study will build off the last comprehensive evaluation of the Ticket program conducted over 10 years ago, which focused on effectiveness rather than access.<sup>3</sup> It supports our [Agency Strategic Plan Strategic Objective 1.1 – Identify and Address Barriers to Accessing Services](#) and our [Equity Action](#)

<sup>3</sup> Information on the last comprehensive evaluation is located here: [Social Security Online - Data and Research \(ssa.gov\)](#).  
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**Plan.** Additionally, this study complements our ongoing Ticket Notice Optimization project which tests the impact of changes to mailed notices on Ticket program participation.<sup>4</sup> Finally, this study will extend our planned Beneficiary Satisfaction Survey of Ticket program participants, to include information about people not using the Ticket program.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will need data on the characteristics of individuals from both administrative data (e.g., Ticket participation status, earnings, benefits forgone due to earnings from work, etc.) and from surveys and qualitative data (e.g., perceptions of the program, job quality/experiences, etc.). We will also need data about the agencies providing services (e.g., what alternative programs exist and are being used, perceived barriers to using various services, etc.).

**Methods:** We will use qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research questions. The qualitative methods include an online questionnaire for providers and interviews with beneficiaries, providers, and program administrators. The quantitative methods include a survey of providers and participants of the TTW program. Additionally, the contractor will analyze existing SSA data.

**Anticipated Challenges:** An ongoing challenge for the Ticket to Work program evaluation is that only a small fraction of beneficiaries use these services and, of those who participate, an even smaller percentage transition to substantial gainful employment. This makes it difficult to draw meaningful inferences from the data, especially once it's stratified to examine demographic factors in addition to outcomes of Ticket participants. Recognizing this challenge but also recognizing the importance of maintaining these programs because of the important services they provide, SSA prioritized the development of effective and appropriate measuring techniques in the solicitation for a contractor to conduct this study. The contractor that was selected is planning to apply cutting-edge analysis techniques to help measure the effectiveness of this program both in general and across demographic factors, including among small and historically marginalized subgroups. Analysis of these subgroups is meaningful for evaluating the equity of the program.

**Dissemination:** The evaluation will culminate with a report or series of reports that we will make available on our [public-facing website](#). We will brief agency executives and external stakeholders and use the information gained from this evaluation to identify potential legislative, regulatory, and sub-regulatory policy changes related to our mission of facilitating the return-to-work of beneficiaries capable of working.

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<sup>4</sup> Information on the Ticket Notice Optimization project is located here: [Increasing Participation in Ticket to Work | Office of Evaluation Sciences \(gsa.gov\)](#).  
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## Project 8 — Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program

### EVALUATION QUESTION

*What are the impacts of interventional programs initiated in collaboration with states, foundations, and other entities on the labor market, program participation, and economic outcomes of SSDI beneficiaries or SSI recipients?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** The purpose of the Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP) is to allow us to enter into cooperative agreements to collaborate with states, foundations, and other non-federal groups and organizations who have the interest and ability to identify, operate, and evaluate interventional research, including interventions targeting or otherwise including underserved populations.

ICAP provides a process through which we can systematically review proposals from outside organizations (including states, foundations, and other non-federal groups and organizations) and enter into cooperative agreements with them for collaboration on interventional research. The cooperative agreements have a three- to five-year project period with a base year and up to four additional years for implementation and evaluation activities. We plan to solicit new projects on a recurring basis. We hope to tap local-external knowledge about potential interventions relevant to beneficiaries who receive SSDI benefits or SSI payments.

ICAP research priority areas are as follows:

- Eliminating the structural barriers in the labor market for people with disabilities, including for people of color and other underserved communities, which increase the likelihood of people receiving or applying for SSDI or SSI benefits;
- Promoting self-sufficiency by helping people, including youth, enter, stay in, or return to the labor force;
- Coordinating planning between private and public human services agencies to improve the administration and effectiveness of the SSDI, SSI, and related programs;
- Assisting claimants in underserved communities who apply for or appeal determinations or decisions on claims for SSDI and SSI benefits; and
- Conducting outreach to people with disabilities who are potentially eligible to receive SSI.

In FY 2021, we awarded two cooperative agreements, one to the Kessler Foundation and one to the State of Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC). The Kessler Foundation will conduct the Vocational Rehabilitation Facilitator Demonstration (VRFD), which is a randomized controlled trial of an employment intervention for rehabilitation patients who have experienced recent neurotrauma. It is an early intervention demonstration for people who might apply for disability programs. The CJCC will conduct a feasibility study on the use of the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) model for incarcerated people who have serious and persistent mental illness.

In FY 2022 we conducted startup activities with the initial awardees, the Kessler Foundation, and the Georgia CJCC. This includes assessing the need for any authority to operate measures and finalizing data sharing terms between the awardees and SSA, as well as receiving approval from OMB for their data collection packages. We also conducted another competition for a second round of ICAP projects and made awards in the first quarter of FY 2023. Round 2 awards were made to Mathematica and Westat. Mathematica will conduct the Transition Exploration Demonstration (TED), which is a

randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of an employment intervention for youth with disabilities who are transitioning into the adult workforce. Westat will conduct the Supportive Housing and Individual Placement and Support (SHIPS) demonstration, which is a randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of combining supported employment services for recently homeless people experiencing a range of disabilities and mental health conditions.

In FY 2023, we completed the startup activities for the projects awarded in FY 2021. We also began startup activities with the second-round awardees (TED and SHIPS). In addition, we conducted the competition for the third round of ICAP and made awards in the last quarter of FY 2023. We made Round 3 awards to the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) and to the University of Chicago's Inclusive Economy Lab (IEL). CDLE will conduct the Interagency Cooperative Action Network (ICAN) demonstration, a randomized assignment trial to test the impact of assisting potentially eligible individuals acquire SSA Disability Benefits while they are concurrently working/seeking employment. The IEL will conduct the Developing Opportunities for ABLE Account Holders (DOABLE) demonstration, a randomized study aimed at promoting the take-up and use of Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts and how ABLE accounts impact employment-related outcomes.

In FY 2024, we will begin startup activities for the Round 3 projects, ICAN and DOABLE, awarded in late FY 2023. We will also complete the startup activities for the Round 2 projects, TED and SHIPS, awarded in early FY2023. Both projects should enter the implementation and evaluation phase in the third quarter of FY2024. VRFD began implementation in the first quarter of FY 2024 and SGCJP will enter the implementation and evaluation phase in the second quarter of FY 2024. In addition, we will solicit applications and make awards for a fourth round of ICAP projects.

In FY 2025, we will proceed with implementation and evaluation activities for the projects awarded in FY 2021 and the first quarter of FY 2023 (VRFD, SGCJP, TED, and SHIPS). We will begin the implementation phase of the projects awarded in Round 3 (ICAN and DOABLE). We will begin startup activities for the fourth round of projects awarded in FY 2024. Additionally, we will solicit applications and make awards for a fifth round of ICAP projects.

This project supports the [Agency Strategic Plan Strategic Objective 1.1 – Identify and Address Barriers to Accessing Services](#) and our [Equity Action Plan](#).

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information we collect will depend on the individual grant awardees' project needs. We will finalize data sharing terms and data collection instruments, as needed, during the first year of the projects.

**Methods:** The grant awardees will recommend specific research and evaluation methods. As part of SSA's substantial involvement in the cooperative agreement, we will provide input on research and evaluation plans. To improve participation of marginalized groups in the interventions, SSA will encourage ICAP applicants to include people of color, people from underserved communities, and people with lived experiences, as appropriate.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We may face challenges finalizing the terms and conditions for data sharing, which may cause delays with starting activities for some grantees.

**Dissemination:** We will post all reports from the projects on our public-facing [website](#) and provide information to committees and workgroups. We are developing a dissemination plan to reach a broad audience. Awardees will prepare final evaluation reports in the last year of their project periods. The project period for both FY 2021 awardees runs through the end of FY 2026; therefore, we anticipate having reports in late FY 2026 or early FY 2027. We will brief agency executives and external stakeholders and use the information gained from these projects to identify potential legislative, regulatory, and sub-regulatory policy changes.

## Project 9 — Beyond Benefits Study

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What services and supports help people exiting the SSDI or SSI programs maintain or achieve self-sufficiency without a need to return to receiving SSDI or SSI benefits?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** Based on medical improvement, many SSDI beneficiaries and SSI recipients no longer meet program requirements for payments each year. However, about 30 percent of adult SSI-only recipients and 20 percent of DI-only beneficiaries who stop receiving benefits because of medical improvement return to these programs within eight years. The specific reasons for their return could include deteriorating health or other barriers to employment, though our administrative records do not indicate conclusive reasons. Among the SSDI beneficiaries whose benefits stop, few maintain employment or work above common thresholds of self-sufficiency.

In FY 2019, we conducted a Technical Expert Panel (TEP) to discuss options for a demonstration to support individuals exiting SSDI due to medical improvement. The TEP recommended we study the services this population needs to support continued or improved self-sufficiency.

We initiated the study based on the TEP's recommendation. We are gathering evidence through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. We will also use motivational interviewing as an intervention to help people explore their barriers to employment. In this process we will gain more insight about the needs of these individuals and barriers to promoting sustained and substantial work activity leading to self-sufficiency for this population. The goal of this information gathering is to identify potential interventions and to inform policy recommendations that are likely to help individuals who have been removed or may be removed from the program achieve sustainable, substantial work leading to self-sufficiency.

In FY 2021, we awarded a contract to conduct a study of the types of services and supports that individuals exiting or potentially exiting the SSDI or SSI programs need to maintain or achieve self-sufficiency.

In FY 2022, we began qualitative data collection activities, i.e., focus groups with practicing motivational interviewers and interviews with 27 members of the target cohort. In FY 2023, we established plans and protocol for remaining data collection activities (i.e., finalized the survey tool and developed sampling and recruitment plans for the motivational interviewing pilot and final focus groups and interviews). In FY 2024, we plan to complete the motivational interviewing intervention pilot with 50 cohort participants and to administer a survey, crafted and informed by early qualitative data analyses, to about 4,000 individuals of the target cohort. We expect to complete all activities by the third quarter of FY 2024 and to receive a final report by the first quarter of FY 2025.

The Beyond Benefits Study supports [Agency Strategic Plan Strategic Objective 1.1 – Identify and Address Barriers to Accessing Services](#).

**Information Needed for the Study:** We are gathering information needed about the barriers to employment and other needs of beneficiaries or recipients that lost or may lose SSA disability assistance due to medical improvement. Data collection methods include surveys, focus groups, and motivational interviewing with study participants. Separate focus groups will also be conducted with Motivational Interviewing practitioners and state VR providers. We used SSA program data to construct the sampling frame and we will update the data used for the final analyses to document the benefit status of participants. Final analyses will include use of SSA program data to provide summary

work histories and earnings summaries.

**Methods:** We are conducting a small, non-random pilot of motivational interviewing to accomplish two goals. First, it will provide information on the duration and intensity of supports that are necessary for such an intervention. Second, it will assist data-gathering efforts by providing additional context about the needs of this population. We will use appropriate statistical methods to summarize results from surveys and we have developed protocols for conducting focus groups and individual interviews. We use established methodologies to ensure high quality data are collected and to guide subsequent analyses of qualitative data. The final report will synthesize findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate any significant challenges with this project.

**Dissemination:** We will post all reports from the project on our [public-facing website](#). We will provide information to stakeholders, including the SSAB, and Congress. We will brief agency executives and external stakeholders and use the information gained from these projects to identify potential demonstrations or legislative, regulatory, and sub-regulatory policy changes. In particular, the Beyond Benefits Study may help identify ways SSA can support the beneficiary experience and the post-beneficiary experience and improve the economic security of those at risk of needing disability benefits.

## Project 10 — Promoting Work through Early Interventions Project

### EVALUATION QUESTION

*To what extent do early intervention programs improve labor force participation and reduce the need for SSI program assistance for the populations they serve?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** The Promoting Work through Early Interventions Project (PWEIP) is a joint undertaking of SSA and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The project will identify, select, and evaluate programs likely to improve the employment and economic outcomes of individuals who have not yet applied for SSI and who have little or no work history and no current or foreseeable disabilities, but who do have ties to U.S. safety net programs (e.g., receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits).

In FY 2019, we developed and entered a jointly financed cooperative arrangement with ACF and transferred \$25 million to support the evaluation and/or service provisions of selected intervention programs. In FY 2020, we worked with ACF to identify and select programs to participate in an evaluation under ACF's Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) and Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) projects.<sup>5</sup> We selected four BEES programs and four NextGen programs. The BEES programs selected are: Individual Placement Support (IPS) for TANF and SNAP participants in the state of Washington; IPS for people with substance use disorder in the state of Ohio; IPS Program within Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) in Chicago, Illinois, and the state of New Hampshire; and Central City Concern (CCC) in the state of Oregon. The NextGen selected programs are: Bridges from School to Work (or "Bridges") in Georgia, Maryland, Illinois, Texas, California, Pennsylvania, and Washington D.C.; IPS program for Justice-involved Adults in two urban sites in Davenport, Iowa and Memphis, Tennessee and three rural sites in the states of Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Illinois; Mental Health Outreach for Mothers (MOMS) Program in the state of Massachusetts; and Inclusion Services for Job Seekers At-risk of SSI Receipt (IJAS) Community Integrated Services (CIS) in the state of Pennsylvania.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACF anticipates PWEIP contract activities will conclude in 2026, rather than 2023, as originally planned. By the conclusion of the PWEIP in 2026, we aim to generate findings that will inform both agencies and contribute meaningfully to the broader field of disability and self-sufficiency research.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We are collecting data for each project and monitoring outcomes of the participants at six months to a year following program participation. We will provide ACF with de-identified individual-level disability data, analyze earnings data, and generate summary statistics about participants of SSA-funded programs. We anticipate these data activities will begin in FY 2024.

**Methods:** We will support rigorous evaluation of existing employment support and training programs informed by evidence and shown to be promising for the population of interest. The selected BEES and NextGen projects target a variety of populations who might be eligible to receive SSI, including individuals with mental health impairments, substance use disorders, recipients of TANF and SNAP, and justice-involved individuals. Interventions will provide employment, training, and mental health services, including testing the Individualized Placement and Support model in multiple settings. The

<sup>5</sup> Further information on these projects is available at [Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio | The Administration for Children and Families \(hhs.gov\)](#).

evaluation will randomly assign participants of BEES and NextGen programs to a treatment or control group. The control group will receive the services and interventions normally offered by a given program. The treatment group will receive services offered as a part of early intervention(s) and work model(s) tested under a specific PWEIP program. Evaluations of each program will include an impact evaluation and implementation research. A select number of evaluations will also include cost analyses. SSA is interested in whether the interventions forestall transitions onto the SSDI and/or SSI programs as well as employment, health, and quality of life. ACF contractors will conduct baseline, interim, and final surveys of participants at the time of enrollment, 12 months later, and at the conclusion of the testing period, respectively. Follow-up will include analysis of program participants' application or eventual enrollment in the SSI or SSDI programs, and analysis of employment trajectories for participants following the target interventions.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Recruitment and enrollment have been a challenge for some of the PWEIP projects because of COVID-19. Some programs have extended the enrollment period and others have made progress in enrollment, but enrollment remains below expectations. We expect these challenges to continue and are planning to meet with ACF to discuss potential options. We will continue to monitor and document such challenges during the project.

**Dissemination:** We will post all reports from the project on our [public-facing website](#). We will provide information to the SSAB, Congress, and other interested stakeholders. We will work with our Office of Communications to formalize a dissemination plan to reach a broad audience. We will brief agency executives and external stakeholders and use the information gained from these projects to identify potential legislative, regulatory, and sub-regulatory policy changes. PWEIP may help identify other agencies SSA can work with to improve the overall customer experience across government programs that help economically challenged individuals with employment barriers attain financial stability, improved health, and improved quality of life.

## Project 11 — Work Disability: Functional Assessment Battery Research Study

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent does the Work Disability Functional Assessment Battery (WD-FAB) improve our ability to identify who to select for a continuing disability review (CDR) full medical review?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The WD-FAB is a self-reported assessment of whole person function developed through a collaborative effort among SSA, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Boston University (BU). The WD-FAB uses Item Response Theory and Computer Adaptive Testing to select the most relevant set of questions from an item bank covering eight components of function in the domains of Physical Function and Mental Health Function. We completed a prototype in 2016 and version 3.1 of the tool in 2019.

Through the WD-FAB study, we will test the use of the instrument in our medical CDR process. The primary objectives of the pilot study are to assess feasibility of integrating the WD-FAB into the CDR business process, examine relationships between single administrations of the WD-FAB and the CDR process, and explore relationships between a change in WD-FAB data and the CDR process. More specifically, we will compare WD-FAB data to CDR predictive model scores, responses to the CDR Mailer (Form SSA-455) questions, and CDR full medical review outcomes for participating beneficiaries. Because this is the first time we will administer the WD-FAB in the beneficiary population, the pilot study includes a secondary aim to understand how beneficiaries endorse symptoms related to whole person function.

This project supports our [Agency Strategic Plan](#) *Strategic Objective 3.3 – Improve Organizational Performance and Policy Implementation*.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We are collecting beneficiaries' responses to the WD-FAB to determine their correspondence with existing SSA medical CDR measures. In September 2020, we awarded a contract to gather the necessary data for the study. The contractor initiated the first wave of data collection in summer 2022 and the second wave of data collection in the second quarter of FY 2023. We completed data collection in the fourth quarter of FY 2023. These dates changed since we published the FY 2024 Evaluation Plan due to additional time needed for our data collection contractor's system to obtain authority to operate from our Office of Information Security, and due to an initial low response rate from SSA beneficiaries during the first wave of data collection, which required us to extend first wave data collection activities to ensure we met our target for completed beneficiary survey responses. We expect to complete all activities by the second quarter of FY 2024 and to receive a final report by the third quarter of FY 2024. In FY 2025, we will engage SSA stakeholders on options to operationalize the WD-FAB within the CDR process.

**Methods:** This pilot study is a descriptive, longitudinal study of a targeted sample of SSDI beneficiaries and SSI recipients that will assess change in function by administering the WD-FAB to the same beneficiaries at two time points roughly six months apart. Information obtained during this evaluation of the WD-FAB in our CDR process will give us an initial evidence base to evaluate if the instrument can add value and supplement our existing CDR business process activities (e.g., CDR predictive model, CDR Mailer, etc.) in identifying which beneficiaries should be selected for a CDR full medical review.

We selected a stratified random sample from cases with medical CDR diaries that have come due in

the first quarter of FY 2022 (i.e., October 1, 2021–December 31, 2021) to identify the participant pool for the study. We stratified the participant pool by predictive model score, diary type, and age. The contractor recruited study participants from the participant pool of adult beneficiaries that we identified.

We implemented procedures to obtain adequate response rates from beneficiaries who need to opt-in to participate in the study. Working with the NIH, we developed a power analysis to identify the appropriate number of beneficiaries to include in our participant pool to help address this challenge and ensure an adequate response from beneficiaries.

To assess whether the WD-FAB improves our ability to identify who to select for a medical CDR, we will use linear regression models with the predictive model scores or responses to the CDR Mailer as the response variable and WD-FAB data as the predictor variables. We will use the regression coefficients and their p-values for exploratory analysis regarding the correlation between WD-FAB and predictive model scores or responses to CDR mailers. In addition, we will develop a linear regression model using CDR full medical review decisions as the outcome measure and the changes in the WD-FAB data and the baseline WD-FAB scores as the predictor variables to assess how the WD-FAB score changes relate to initial CDR full medical review decisions.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Due to additional time needed for our data collection contractor's system to obtain authority to operate from our Office of Information Security, data collection activities were not completed until August 2023, which is a change from what we published in the FY 2023 Evaluation Plan. Due to the delay, we expect to receive an analysis report from NIH in FY 2024. The additional time will allow for most, if not all, cases to obtain final medical CDR outcomes within the study's data collection timeframe (i.e., FY 2023).

**Dissemination:** We expect to receive an analysis report from NIH in FY 2024, and we will disseminate the report to internal and external stakeholders. We will post the report on our [public-facing website](#). We will work with NIH and BU to disseminate the findings through conferences and other professional outlets. We intend to use the results of this pilot study to determine if a larger scale study is needed. A larger scale study would be needed before we could determine if/how the WD-FAB could be used/applied in our processes.

## Project 12 — Barriers Analysis

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent, if any, have our changes to policies, principles, and practices changed equal opportunity and diversity in our workforce?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** In 2015, our Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity (OCREO) created a barrier analysis program that complies with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines. This program helps us create a barrier-free workplace and enables equal employment opportunities and a diverse workforce. The EEOC defines a *barrier* as an agency policy, principle, or practice that limits or tends to limit employment opportunities for members of a particular equal employment opportunity group based on their sex, race, ethnic background, or disability status.

The first part of our process is an investigation of triggers. The EEOC defines a *trigger* as “a trend, disparity, or anomaly that suggests the need for further inquiry into a particular policy, practice, procedure, or condition.” To identify triggers, we compare workforce data snapshots to benchmarks, and we note irregularities that may point to potential institutional barriers. Some barriers are based on employees’ perceptions, as revealed in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) and our optional exit surveys completed by employees who separate from the agency.

From our investigation, we identify the root causes of barriers and update our Barrier Analysis Action Plan with action items to eliminate those barriers at all levels of the workplace. In FY 2024, we will conduct an analysis to identify any new barriers and use the information to update the existing Barrier Analysis Action Plan. In FY 2025 and FY 2026, we will assess the extent to which our implementation of the action items identified in the updated action plan successfully enhanced equal employment opportunities and diversity in our workforce.

The project supports our [Agency Strategic Plan Strategic Objective 2.1 – Promote Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in Hiring and Advancement](#).

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will use data on the characteristics of our workforce employees; job applicants; and people selected for employment, promotion, and developmental opportunities, such as our career development programs. We will also use data about equal employment opportunity complaints and labor union grievances. We will review data from the FEVS and from employees who are leaving the agency through our Exit Survey results, which our Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development collects.

**Methods:** We use our administrative data to compare characteristics of job applicants and our workforce within specific job positions, grade levels (including the Senior Executive Service), offices, and leadership development programs, to benchmarks that include the characteristics of our overall workforce. When we identify discrepancies between the characteristics within a specific group (e.g., lower percentage of our employees in higher grade levels, including Senior Executive Service members, who have a disability compared to our benchmark), we conduct a root cause analysis that includes interviews with key stakeholders to identify whether our policies, procedures, and practices are barriers to equal employment opportunities. We then develop an action plan to eradicate the barriers. The action plan is a living document that is subject to change based on our annual analysis. We internally track the strategies outlined in the action plan quarterly to ensure necessary actions are being taken in collaboration with stakeholders. Strategies are updated, deleted, or added where applicable, according to discussions with stakeholders relating to necessary resources and other factors that may

impact completion. We also analyze data from the FEVS and exit survey results, along with other data, to help us determine what factors contribute to identified triggers.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Our ability to collect and analyze data through a variety of methods is limited to available data and legal limitations on data usage, and we are committed to fulfilling any labor negotiations required.

**Dissemination:** We will disseminate the results of this evaluation project as part of the Management Directive 715 (MD-715) Report to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as required. The report will be made available to agency employees via OCREO's intranet website.

# ANNUAL SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAM ASSESSMENTS

We conduct several program assessments that fill critical knowledge gaps regarding the programs we administer. These assessments are foundational for making evidence-based decisions about potential changes to our programs, policies, operations, or service delivery. Each of these assessments fall within our definition of significant activities used for our Annual Evaluation Plan.

## Project 13 — Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*Do the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) and the Disability Insurance (DI) programs have sufficient trust fund reserves and projected income to pay scheduled benefits over a prospective 75-year period?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The Social Security Act (the Act) established the Board of Trustees to oversee the financial operations of the OASI and DI Trust Funds. The Act requires that the Board of Trustees, among other duties, report annually to Congress on the actuarial status and financial operations of the OASI and DI Trust Funds. This report provides a vast amount of descriptive data and analysis on the financial status of the OASI and DI Trust Funds. It also includes an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of the program's capacity to pay scheduled benefits over the course of a prospective 75-year period. While the assessment includes information on several outcomes, two key outcomes of interest to policymakers are:

1. The estimated date that each trust fund's reserves will be depleted; and
2. The estimated percentage of scheduled benefits that each program will be able to support when its trust fund reserves are depleted.

The report includes a description of the uncertainty in the outcomes using:

1. Alternative deterministic scenarios (i.e., high-cost and low-cost scenarios);
2. A stochastic model; and
3. Sensitivity analysis on key assumptions.

Our Office of the Chief Actuary (OCACT) conducts the research and develops the assumptions, methods, and projections that support this annual report to Congress. OCACT uses the results of this annual assessment as a basis for evaluating legislative and regulatory proposals that affect the trust funds. Our Office of Retirement and Disability Policy uses the results of this assessment to develop our Modelling Income in the Near Term (MINT) microsimulation model that we use to evaluate the distributional effects of proposed changes to the programs. Policymakers rely on this information when considering changes to the program to improve program solvency or for other purposes. Thus, the assessment is foundational for other important evaluation activities that we perform on a regular basis.

The assessment described in the annual report is among the most important activities that we support and disseminate, as policymakers rely on this report to make important decisions on the future of the OASI and DI programs.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information needed for the assessment comes from a variety of sources. OCACT works closely with representatives for each Trustee to develop the demographic,

economic, and program benefit assumptions that the Trustees use for the annual report. The information used to develop the assumptions comes from a variety of sources, including:

1. Analyses of historical data and relationships related to each assumption from various sources, including other government agencies and private forecasters;
2. SSAB Technical Panel on Methods and Assumptions Reports;
3. RDRC research; and
4. Other research relevant to the assumptions.

The report uses information from a variety of Social Security program data sources, program and survey data from other federal agencies, and data from other sources. OCACT identifies the information needed for the evaluation in their documentation on the assumptions and methods used for the short-range evaluation and for the long-range evaluation.

**Methods:** The report includes both a descriptive study of the current trust fund status and an assessment that addresses the question, “Are program finances sufficient to pay scheduled benefits over a prospective 75-year period?” OCACT provides a detailed description of the methods used in each report in the following two documents available under the Model Documentation section on our [2023 OASDI Trustees Report website](#):

1. Long-Range OASDI Projection Methodology; and
2. Short-Range Actuarial Projections of the OASDI Program, 2010.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We use a variety of dissemination methods. The Trustee’s Report is available on OCACT’s public-facing [Reports of the Board of Trustees website](#). We send an electronic copy of the report to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and to the Congressional committees of jurisdiction. The day the Trustees release the report to the public, we issue a press release that describes the key findings and a link to the report on our website. Our Chief Actuary participates in a discussion with members of the press to provide information on the content within the report and to respond to their questions on the report. Our Chief Actuary also presents the findings to external stakeholders, including members of Congress and their staffs, the SSAB, the Bipartisan Policy Center, the National Academy of Social Insurance, and various actuarial professional organizations. In recent years, our Office of Communications and Chief Actuary have used social media (e.g., Facebook live) to disseminate the findings and to respond to questions from the public on the financial status of the program.

## Project 14 — Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the current status of the SSI program and what are the estimated number of SSI recipients and the SSI program costs associated with administering the program over a prospective 25-year period?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193) directs the SSA Commissioner to report annually to the President and to Congress on the status of the SSI program. The report includes an assessment of the status of the SSI program using systematic data collection and analysis. The report must include estimates of two important SSI program outcomes: (1) the estimated number of SSI recipients over a prospective period of at least 25 years, and (2) the estimated SSI program costs through a prospective period of at least 25 years. The report must also include a comprehensive description of the SSI program, a historical summary of statutory changes to the SSI program, and summaries of any relevant research on the SSI program by SSA or others. Other requirements of the report include historical and current data relating to:

1. Claims intake and dispositions at all levels of decision-making;
2. Demographic information about recipients, including program cost and prior enrollment in other public benefit programs;
3. Redeterminations, medical continuing disability reviews, and uptake of work incentives;
4. Administrative costs; and
5. State supplementation program operations.

This assessment of the status of the SSI program, the estimated number of recipients over a prospective 25-year period, and the estimated program costs of the SSI program over a prospective 25-year period provides policymakers with extensive information that they can use when considering legislative changes, regulatory changes, or policy changes to the SSI program.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information needed for the assessment is described in the annual report. The demographic and economic assumptions used in the projections are based on the intermediate set of assumptions of the Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal OASI and Federal SSDI Trust Funds (Trustees Report) issued in that year. There are five main inputs to the current projection model for SSI recipients and program costs:

1. Historical and projected estimates of the Social Security area population by single year of age and sex;
2. Projected Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs);
3. Historical tabulations of the numbers of recipients in current-payment status and suspense status by whether the recipient is receiving payments based solely on age or due to disability, single year of age, and sex;
4. Historical tabulations of the numbers of recipients transitioning into and out of SSI payment status by the same characteristics as in (2) above; and
5. Historical tabulations of the total amount of Federal SSI payments by the same characteristics mentioned in (2) above.

**Methods:** The methods for conducting the projections are described in the annual report. Using the inputs for the projection of SSI recipients described in the section above, transitions into SSI payment status are projected separately for: (1) new recipients resulting from an application for program payments; and (2) returns to payment status from suspended status. Movements out of payment status are projected separately for: (1) terminations due to death; (2) suspensions due to excess income; and (3) suspensions of payment for all other reasons. The programmatic assumptions and methods are reexamined each year and, if warranted, revised considering recent experience and new information about future conditions. We also consider analyses of historical data and relationships related to each assumption from various sources, including other government agencies and private forecasters, as well as other research relevant to the assumption or set of assumptions.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We use a variety of dissemination methods. The report is available on our [Actuarial Publications website](#). We send electronic copies of the report to the President, the Vice-President, and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. We also send electronic copies to the Congressional committees of jurisdiction and other interested Congressional members and staff.

## Project 15 — Pre-Effectuation Review of Disability Determinations

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTIONS

*What is the return rate of state disability determination services (DDS) initial and reconsideration allowances of disability program applications? What are the estimated federal benefit savings attributable to the pre-effectuation review?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Questions:** Title II of the Act requires the review of at least 50 percent of all OASDI initial and reconsideration disability allowances made by State DDSs. We consider a disability allowance policy-compliant when the evidence in the file is sufficient to determine disability and when the determination is consistent with the evidence, federal law, federal regulations, and operating policies and procedures.

Section 221(c)(3)(C) of the Act requires us to report to the Committee on Ways and Means of the House of Representatives and to the Committee on Finance of the Senate on the pre-effectuation reviews of State DDS disability determinations conducted during the previous fiscal year. The legislative mandate specifies that the report include information on: (1) the numbers of such reviews; and (2) our findings on the accuracy of the State DDS determinations based on such reviews.

In addition, section 1633(e) of the Act requires similar pre-effectuation reviews of specified levels of State DDS allowances of applications by persons aged 18 or older for SSI benefits based on blindness or disability. Since FY 2008, the required level of our SSI reviews is also at least 50 percent of initial and reconsideration allowances at State DDSs.

In FY 2021, we established new pre-effectuation reviews of Federal Disability Processing Branch favorable initial and reconsideration determinations. Although the reviews of these branches mirror pre-effectuation reviews of State DDS allowances, the above-mentioned statutes do not include cases adjudicated by the Federal Branches. We use the same predictive models based on data captured in our quality assurance samples and we use that data to score each case upon clearance to identify cases with a high probability of reversal.

We use the findings from our assessment using systematic data collection and methods to identify areas where additional training or policy guidance is needed.

**Information Needed for the Study:** Disability claim folders contain the evidence used to make decisions on claims, and we review this evidence during pre-effectuation reviews. We use program data to estimate the program cost effects that result from the reviews of DDS allowances.

**Methods:** We select cases for pre-effectuation review from the 50 states and the District of Columbia, and OASDI disability cases from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, using a statistical model to identify allowances with a high probability of containing substantive errors (i.e., potential to reverse the determination from allowance to denial).

Quality reviewers within our disability quality review branches (DQB) review the cases to determine whether the evidence documented in the files is sufficient to determine disability and whether the determination is consistent with the evidence and with federal regulations and operating policies and procedures.

We record data on:

- The total number of cases reviewed;

- The number of decisional returns (i.e., the number of cases in which the quality review performed by the DQB did not agree with the outcome determined by the DDS);
- The number of documentation returns (i.e., the number of cases in which the quality review performed by the DQB revealed that the evidence upon which the DDS based its decision was insufficient); and
- The total number of returns (decisional returns plus documentation returns).

We compute the return rate as the total number of cases returned divided by the total number of cases reviewed, multiplied by 100.

We use this data, combined with other data described in Table 2 in our Annual Report on Social Security Pre-effectuation Reviews of Favorable State Disability Determinations, to estimate the program cost effects attributable to the pre-effectuation review process.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We send this annual pre-effectuation review report to Congress. The public may obtain this report on our public-facing [Legislative Proposals, Recurring and Periodic Reports to Congress](#) website and data from our [Open Government Initiative website](#).

## Project 16 — Targeted Denial Review

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the return rate of State DDS initial and reconsideration denials of disability program applications?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The targeted denial review complements the pre-effectuation review. It examines the return rate of all State DDS and Federal Disability Processing Branch denials of applications for disability benefits. We draw the sample using a predictive model based on data captured in our quality assurance samples. Upon DDS clearance, we use that data to score each case to identify cases with a high probability of reversal.

We review DDSs disability determinations and Federal Disability Processing Branches in our 11 disability quality branches (DQBs) in the Office of Quality Review field sites throughout the nation. Our central office gathers the data from these reviews to produce monthly targeted denial review reports for us at the national, regional, and state levels.

During our review, we identify cases that are not compliant with national disability policy. When we find the disability determination does not comply with our policy and procedure, we cite a deficiency to the DDS. We use the findings from our assessment, using systematic data collection and methods, to identify areas where additional training or policy guidance is needed.

**Information Needed for the Study:** Disability claim folders contain the evidence used to make determinations on claims. We review the evidence while conducting targeted denial reviews.

**Methods:** We select cases for targeted denial reviews from the DDSs in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, eight Federal Disability Processing Branches, and SSDI cases from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico using a statistical model to identify allowances with a high probability of containing substantive errors (i.e., potential to reverse the determination from denial to allowance). Quality reviewers within our DQBs review the cases to determine whether the evidence documented in the file is sufficient to support the denial determination and whether the denial determination is consistent with federal regulations and operating policies and procedures.

We record data on:

- The total number of cases reviewed;
- The number of decisional deficiencies (i.e., the number of cases in which the DQB's quality review did not agree with the outcome determined by the DDS);
- The number of documentation deficiencies (i.e., the number of cases in which the quality review revealed that the evidence upon which the DDS based its decision was insufficient); and
- The total number of deficiencies (decisional deficiencies plus documentation deficiencies) cited.

We compute the return rate as the total number of cases returned divided by the total number of cases reviewed, multiplied by 100.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We make the data from targeted denial reviews available to the public on our public-facing [Open Government Initiative website](#).

## Project 17 — Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Stewardship Review

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the payment accuracy rate related to the non-medical aspects of the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) payments?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The OASDI stewardship review provides an accuracy measurement of the non-medical aspects of OASI payments and SSDI payments. The non-medical aspects of OASI payments and SSDI payments include changes in payment amounts due to work activity (e.g., the annual earnings test for OASI, or the performance of substantial gainful activity for DI) or changes in payment due to application of a provision in the law (e.g., Windfall Elimination Provision, Government Pension Offset, Workers Compensation Offset). Payment errors include both underpayments (payments issued are less than what is due to beneficiaries) and overpayments (payments issued are more than what is due to beneficiaries).

The OASI and SSDI stewardship review findings provide the basis for reports to monitoring authorities and meet the reporting requirements of the Payment Integrity Information Act (PIIA) of 2019. Additionally, we use these findings to establish the OASDI payment accuracy performance measure in the Annual Performance Report.

The OASDI stewardship review is an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of our program and policies. The results are used to identify: (1) areas where additional training for our employees is needed; (2) whether we need to develop legislative proposals to address issues with administering the program (e.g., obtaining data on wage amounts from a payroll information provider); or (3) whether we need to pursue program changes or pilot projects to test alternatives to the current process and how we should design those changes.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information for this study is derived from quality reviewers who interview a random sample of OASI and SSDI beneficiaries, or their representative payees, and redevelop the non-medical factors of eligibility and entitlement (such as evidence of birth, marriage, and child relationship) to determine if the beneficiary was eligible for a payment and to verify that the payment issued was correct according to the applicable statutes and/or regulations. We also use our program data, such as the Master Beneficiary Record, which includes the data related to the OASI or SSDI payment computations for beneficiaries.

When a reviewer identifies a payment error on a sampled case, the reviewer records a specific deficiency code that represents the error associated with the improper payment, the dollar amount of the payment error, and the specific cause and location of the error. There may be multiple deficiencies associated with a payment amount. We construct separate aggregate overpayment or underpayment amounts for these cases when we report our stewardship review findings.

**Methods:** We base the stewardship review on a monthly sample of OASDI beneficiaries in current payment status. Each month, we select approximately 111 OASI cases and 58 SSDI cases of beneficiaries residing in the United States. Annually, we also select 160 cases of beneficiaries who live outside of the 50 states or U.S. territories or who receive U.S. totalization benefits. We interview the beneficiary or representative payee, make collateral contacts as needed, and redevelop all non-medical factors of eligibility as of the sample month. The objective of the stewardship review is to identify improper payments, not to assess the agency's compliance with policy and procedures or predict the

impact of proposed changes to policies and procedures. Therefore, we assess payment accuracy based on all the developed factors of entitlement that have any potential to affect the payment issued in the sample month.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We report the findings from the OASDI stewardship review to OMB, provide a summary of the findings in the Annual Performance Report, and post information from the report on the OMB website: [High-Priority Programs \(paymentaccuracy.gov\)](https://www.paymentaccuracy.gov).

## Project 18 — Supplemental Security Income Stewardship Review

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the payment accuracy rate related to the non-medical aspects of SSI payments?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** Our SSI stewardship review provides estimates of payment accuracy related to the non-medical aspects of SSI payments. SSI is a means-tested program, and non-medical aspects of SSI payments may include living arrangements, resources, wages, and other eligibility factors. Payment errors include both underpayments (payments issued are less than what is owed to the recipient) and overpayments (payments issued are more than what is owed to the recipient).

The stewardship review is a significant assessment tool. Its findings serve as the basis for reports to monitoring authorities and satisfy the reporting requirements of the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019. We use the stewardship data to identify error-prone areas and formulate initiatives to reduce improper payments.

The SSI stewardship review is an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of our program and policies. The results are used to identify: (1) areas where additional training is needed for our employees; (2) whether we need to develop legislative proposals to address issues with administering the program (e.g., obtaining data on wage amounts from a payroll information provider); or (3) whether we need to pursue program changes or pilot projects to test alternatives to the current process and how we should design those changes.

**Information Needed for the Study:** Quality reviewers derive the information for this study by interviewing a sample of SSI recipients or their representative payees and redeveloping all non-medical factors of eligibility to determine if the payments issued were correct according to applicable statutes and regulations. We compare the quality review findings with our program data, such as the Supplemental Security Record, which includes the data related to SSI payment computations for recipients.

For each case in the sample with a payment error, the quality reviewer records the specific deficiency that caused the improper payment, and the dollar amount of the payment error associated with the specific deficiency. There may be multiple deficiencies associated with an SSI payment, and we construct separate aggregate overpayment or underpayment amounts for these cases when we report our stewardship review findings.

**Methods:** We derive accuracy rates using data collected from the review of a national sample of SSI cases. For a case to be included in our sample, we must have issued a payment in at least one month of the fiscal year under review. Historically, the sample has included about 4,000 cases.

The objective of the stewardship review is to identify and quantify improper payments. It involves interviewing SSI recipients, or their representative payees, and redeveloping all non-medical factors of eligibility to determine if the payments issued were correct according to the applicable statutes and regulations. We use the resources necessary to obtain all relevant evidence needed to assess payment accuracy for every case we review. Any difference between what was actually paid and what the reviewer determines should have been paid is expressed as an overpayment or underpayment error. It is not operationally feasible for us to conduct this review for all SSI cases on an ongoing basis. For this reason, the review is not ideally suited to predict or assess the impact of initiatives to reduce improper payments. The overpayment and underpayment accuracy rates are the percentage of all

dollars paid that are free of overpayments or underpayments. We calculate and report overpayment and underpayment accuracy rates separately. The data presented in the Annual Stewardship Report is weighted, enabling us to project the findings to the entire population of SSI recipients.

Annually, we re-assess our study methodology and the data elements we capture, based upon audit findings and information needs identified throughout the year.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We report the findings from the SSI stewardship review to OMB, provide a summary of the findings in the Annual Performance Report, and post information from the report on the OMB website: [High-Priority Programs \(paymentaccuracy.gov\)](https://www.paymentaccuracy.gov).



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Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 Documentation

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