

Agency Goals

SSA has established three broad fundamental goals that define the results we expect to accomplish as we fulfill our mission. The Agency goals are:

- Rebuild Public Confidence in Social Security;*
- Provide World-Class Service; and*
- Create a Supportive Environment for SSA Employees.*

Under each goal, we show actual performance in meeting Agency long-term objectives, intermediate objectives and GPRA performance goals. Charts 1 through 9 and 16 display progress against the long-term objectives. SSA has developed intermediate GPRA goals to ensure that we continue to make progress towards the objectives which present the greatest challenge to the Agency. Our performance against these objectives are shown in charts 10, 11, 14 and 15. Finally, charts 12 and 13 display our progress in achieving select FY 1997 GPRA workload goals. In FY 1998, we will report performance against the performance indicators included in SSA's new strategic plan, "Keeping The Promise," issued in September 1997.

Progress in Achieving Our Goals

GOAL: Rebuild public confidence in Social Security.

Public confidence and support are important to the successful administration and planning of SSA's programs. An independent survey done in 1997 asked the public about their confidence level in Social Security. As shown in the chart below, 39 percent of the public indicated they were "very confident" or "somewhat confident" in Social Security.

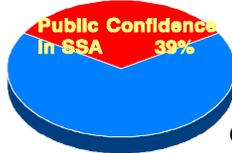


Chart 1

Observation

Recognizing that a public well informed about Social Security is more likely to have confidence in the program, Social Security continued efforts to educate people about the value of Social Security.

The adequacy of trust fund reserves, the provision of personal earnings and benefit estimate statements and the timely maintenance of reliable lifetime earnings records for the public are key measures of the success of SSA's initiative to rebuild public confidence in Social Security. (See pages 65 through 82 for a discussion on how effectively and efficiently SSA performs its day-to-day business functions and the Agency's progress in achieving a full range of its service delivery goals and objectives.)

Trust fund assets will be sufficient to pay 1 year's worth of benefits.

The trust funds are deemed adequately financed on a pay-as-you-go basis if the asset level at the end of a year is sufficient to cover at least 1 year's worth of benefit payments in the absence of other income such as payroll taxes.

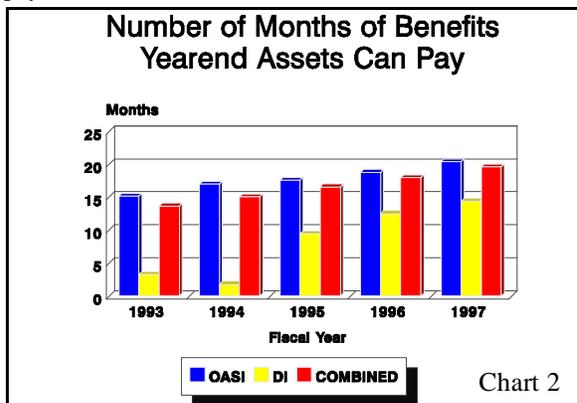


Chart 2

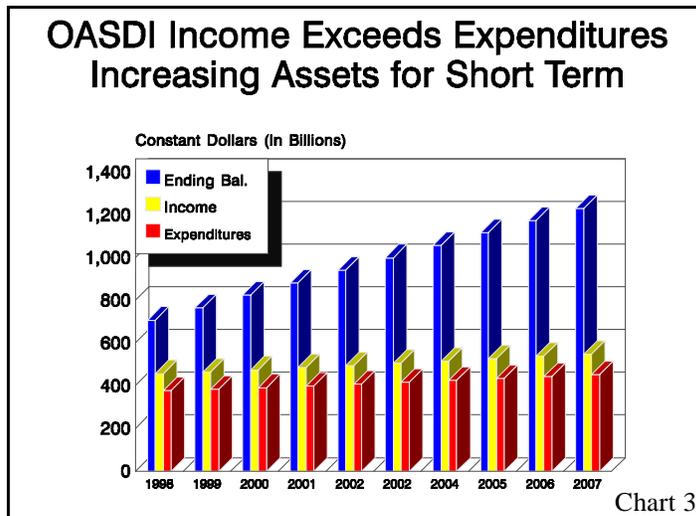
Observation

The number of months of benefits that combined yearend OASDI assets can pay has grown from 13.7 months at the end of FY 1993 to 19.6 months at the end of FY 1997, a 43 percent increase. For the last 4 years, the level of combined assets was deemed sufficient to finance the OASDI programs on a pay-as-you-go basis.



Trust fund assets will meet or exceed trust fund expenditures for each of the next ten years.

The trust funds are deemed adequately financed for the "short term" if actuarial estimates of assets meet or exceed outlay estimates in each year of the next decade. Estimates in the 1997 Trustees Report indicate that the OASI and DI Trust Funds are adequately financed over the short term (next 10 years), having sufficient assets to pay full benefits until 2031 and 2015, respectively.

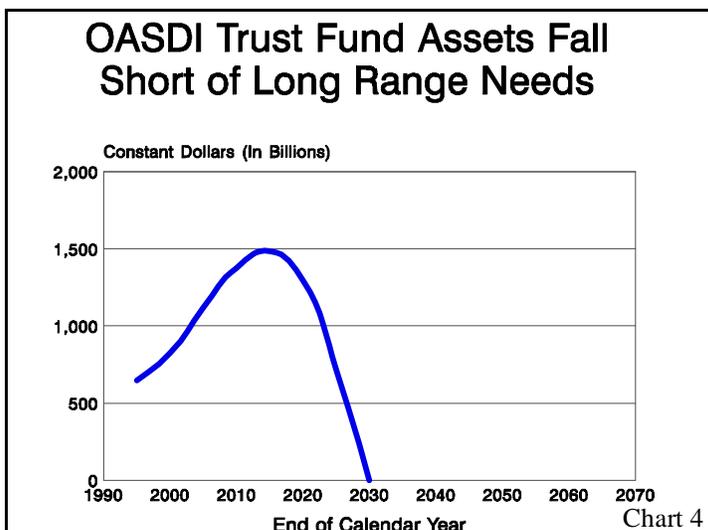


Observation

While combined OASDI expenditures and income are expected to increase by 21.9 percent and 21.5 percent, respectively over the ten year period, trust fund assets are expected to grow by 90.0 percent.

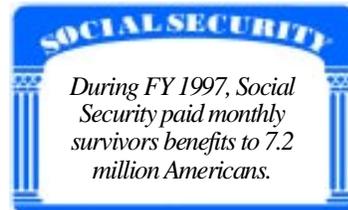
Trust fund assets will be sufficient to meet a long-range test of close actuarial balance.

The trust funds are deemed adequately financed for the "long-term" if actuarial estimates of revenues over the next 75 years can finance expenditures estimated for that period. Combined assets will continue growing over the next 25 years because the financing scheduled in current law results in temporary partial advance funding of benefits payable to the baby-boom generation, which begins retiring about 2010. The size of the actuarial balance for any period represents a measure of the program's financial adequacy for that period. For the long-term (over the next 75 years), the OASI and DI programs **are not** in close actuarial balance. (See pages 49 through 55 for further information about the adequacy of trust fund reserves.)



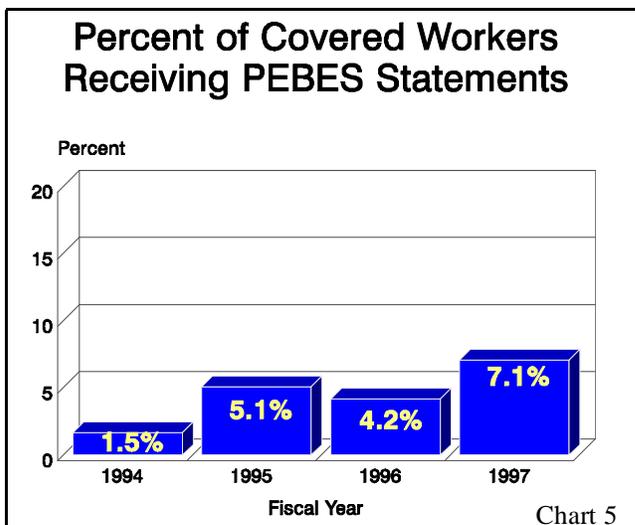
Observation

By 2029, under present law, OASDI assets will not be sufficient to pay 100 percent of benefits due, based on current estimates. At that time, OASDI revenues will be sufficient to pay about 75 percent of benefits. Over the 75-year projection period, the actuarial deficit equals 2.23 percent of taxable payroll.



SSA will issue Personal Earnings and Benefits Estimate Statements (PEBES) to all covered workers, age 25 and over.

As a service to the public, SSA provides summaries of earnings histories and estimates of benefit amounts upon request. Starting in FY 1995, under legislative mandate, SSA began sending SSA-Initiated PEBES (SIPEBES) to more segments of the working population. Current law requires that, by FY 2000, these statements be sent annually, unsolicited, to workers age 25 and over. SSA expects the SIPEBES to generate additional workloads for the Agency, mostly in the form of public inquiries and requests for earnings corrections. SSA is spreading this workload out more evenly by issuing first-time PEBES to some younger workers during the FY 1996-1999 period. Our goal is to release as many initial statements as possible before the annual issuance process begins in FY 2000.

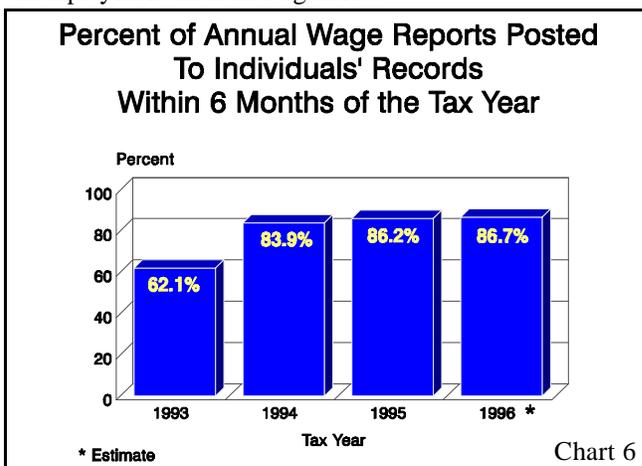


Observation

Less than 2 percent of covered workers request PEBES each year. During FY 1997 SSA issued 15.7 PEBES including 12.4 SIPEBES to workers age 60 and over to comply with legislation. Estimates of SIPEBES, required by law, to be issued in FY 1998 to workers age 60 and over and in FY 2000 to workers age 25 and over are 1.8 million and 123 million, respectively.

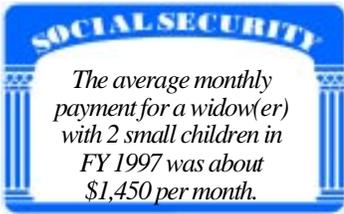
SSA will accurately post all annual wage reports (AWR) within six months following the close of the tax year.

During FY 1997, SSA continued its efforts to improve accuracy and processing times for both wages and self-employment income. Employers and payroll processors were approached through outreach initiatives including instructional videos and special publications to enhance wage report accuracy. The IRS/SSA wage reconciliation process continued to be performed on a current basis and additional wages were posted as a result. SSA is working with the Departments of Treasury and Labor to reduce the tax and wage reporting burden on employers while improving the effectiveness of each Agency's operations. The objective is to simplify laws and procedures, provide enhanced assistance and services to employers for easier filing and enable employers to electronically file a single return that can be used by SSA, IRS and State tax and unemployment insurance agencies.



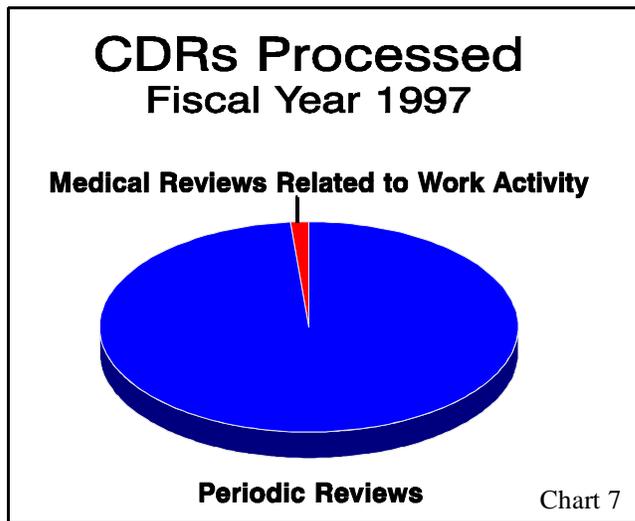
Observation

SSA is working to increase the number of annual wage reports filed electronically. Reports filed electronically tend to be more accurate and can be processed more efficiently and cost effectively than paper or magnetic media reports. Progress in this initiative should increase SSA's performance in this measure as well as overall posting accuracy.



SSA will process all legislatively required Continuing Disability Reviews (CDR).

SSA has been unable to process all CDRs required by law. Currently, the backlog of approximately 2.1 million DI cases and 2.0 million SSI cases is still growing, although at a slower rate. To close this gap, Congress passed legislation which adjusts discretionary spending caps, thus permitting allocation of additional funds to SSA for CDR processing. In FY 1997, SSA conducted over 38 percent more periodic CDRs than in FY 1996.



Observation

During FY 1997, SSA was able to perform 690,478 periodic reviews and 20,224 medical reviews related to work issues. SSA expects to perform close to 1.2 million CDRs in FY 1998.

GOAL: Provide world-class service.

SSA's five core business processes--enumeration, earnings, claims, postentitlement and informing the public--all relate directly to the services SSA provides to the American people. We provide those services using, in varying degrees and for various purposes, six service delivery interfaces: face-to-face service provided directly by SSA, telephone service in the field office, telephone service over the 800 Number, service through the mail, service provided by third parties and automated self-service. Approximately 85 percent of SSA's employees perform direct service to the public, in addition to all of the State DDS employees. Virtually all other SSA employees provide support to the front line.

SSA is dedicated to providing world-class service to all of the people it serves. In basic terms, world-class service is defined as service equal or superior to that provided anywhere in the comparable public or private sectors. SSA has always been committed to providing its customers with service that is of the highest quality possible. Customer satisfaction remains very high, and SSA's accuracy in providing basic services--particularly enumeration and the paying of benefits--are exemplary. SSA continues to provide caring, courteous service to all its customers.

In each of the programs SSA administers and through each available service delivery interface, providing this level of service involves different challenges. But in every program and across every interface, the goal is the same: to provide world-class service to every customer, every time.



SSA will provide prompt, courteous service to the public, both in person and on the telephone, at all times.

SSA is committed to ensuring equity of service across geographic lines, program lines and demographic lines. One important thrust is improving service to our many non-English speaking customers. We know we must treat all of our customers with equal care and consideration. To improve the quality and timeliness of our service, SSA is paying greater attention to our customers' comments. Customers have indicated through a variety of mechanisms that they expect SSA to do more than issue benefit checks accurately and on time.

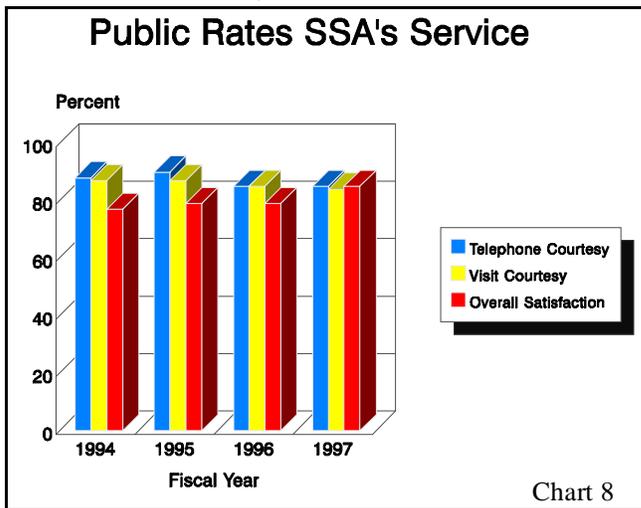


Chart 8

Observation

Customers who consider staff courteous are more likely to give high ratings for overall satisfaction. Consistent with prior years, customers give Social Security staff high marks for courtesy. In FY 1997, 85 percent of customers who called the 800 telephone number were satisfied with staff courtesy. Of the people who actually visited a field office, 85 percent of those interviewed said they were satisfied with staff courtesy. In FY 1997, the number of customers expressing overall satisfaction with SSA's services increased to 85 percent, a significant increase over the FY 1996 rate of 79 percent.

SSA will recruit bilingual public contact employees for field offices and the 800-number telephone service.

To meet the needs of non-English-speaking customers, SSA recruits bilingual individuals to act as a public contact for customers visiting SSA field offices and calling SSA's 800-number telephone service. SSA also provides notices and public information materials in Spanish and works with community groups to increase understanding of SSA-administered programs and provide translation services. In addition, SSA has developed a Spanish version of the PEBES statement and has broadened information and outreach efforts by producing a series of fact sheets in five Pacific-Asian languages. Additionally, we are using census data to customize bilingual services by geographical location.

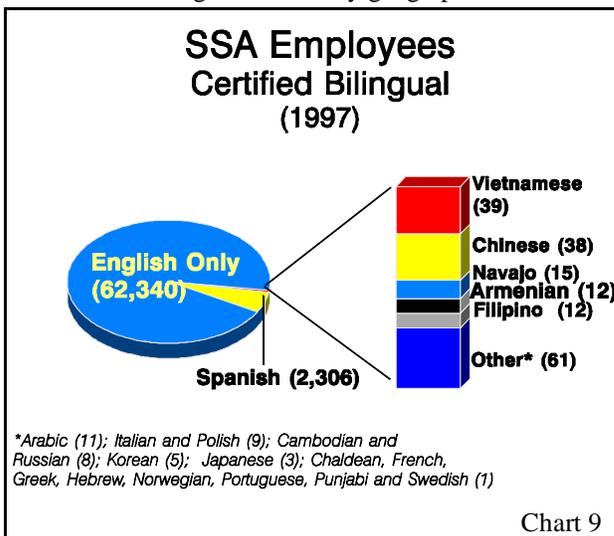


Chart 9

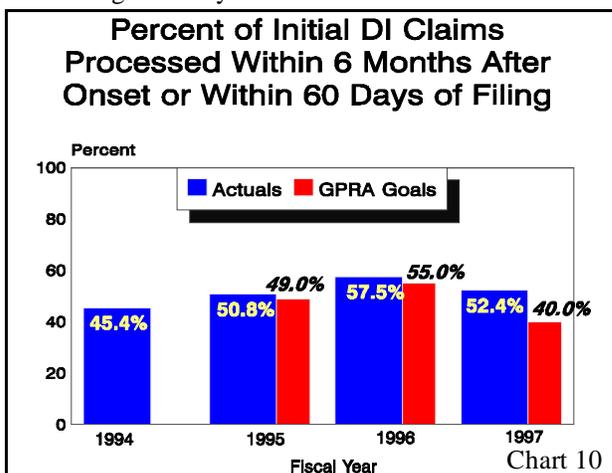
Observation

Eleven percent of new employees hired during FY 1997 were certified bilingual. Under the current initiative to recruit additional bilingual public contact employees for field and telephone service, SSA hopes to increase the percent of staff certified bilingual from its current 3.8 percent.



SSA will process all initial DI claims within 6 months after onset or 60 days of effective filing date, whichever is later.

Each year, the DI initial claims workload presents many challenges for the Agency as it continues to be one of the largest workload categories in SSA. This workload demands a considerable amount of the Agency’s resources as it streamlines its workforce and implements a new disability process. The overall DI initial claims processing time had steadily decreased from FYs 1994 through 1996. However, in FY 1997, DI processing time rose 8.6 days over FY 1996. The increased processing time can be attributed to critical, time-sensitive workloads that required redirection of resources from the claims area. These workloads include the review of childhood cases required by the Welfare Reform legislation and the increased volume of continuing disability reviews.

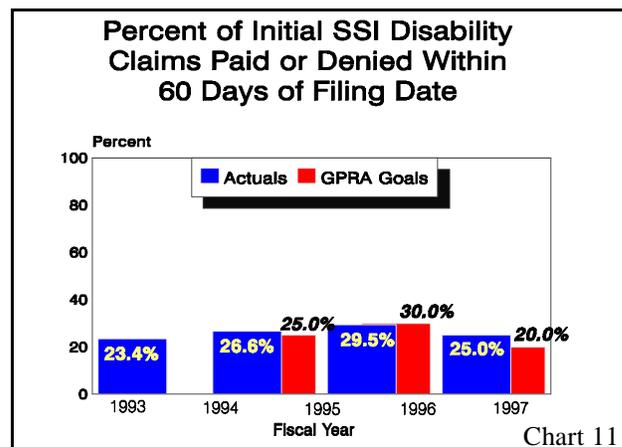


Observation

During FY 1997, SSA was able to exceed the GPRA goal by 31 percent. This was the third consecutive year the goal was exceeded.

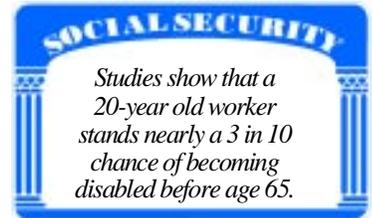
SSA will pay or deny all initial SSI disability claims within 60 days of filing date.

The Agency has realized that a change in its business processes is crucial if we are to meet the demands of the new century. This continues to be a driving influence in our efforts to attain the goal of providing timely decisions on SSI disability claims. Though the Agency has not yet achieved this long range goal, we are gradually moving towards our objective by implementing short-term disability projects as well as a long term redesign of the disability program. However, in FY 1997 there was a decrease of 4.5 percentage points in the percent of SSI blind/disabled claims paid within 60 days of filing date compared to FY 1996. This reversal was related to the redirection of resources to address the Welfare Reform Childhood reviews and the increased volume of continuing disability reviews.



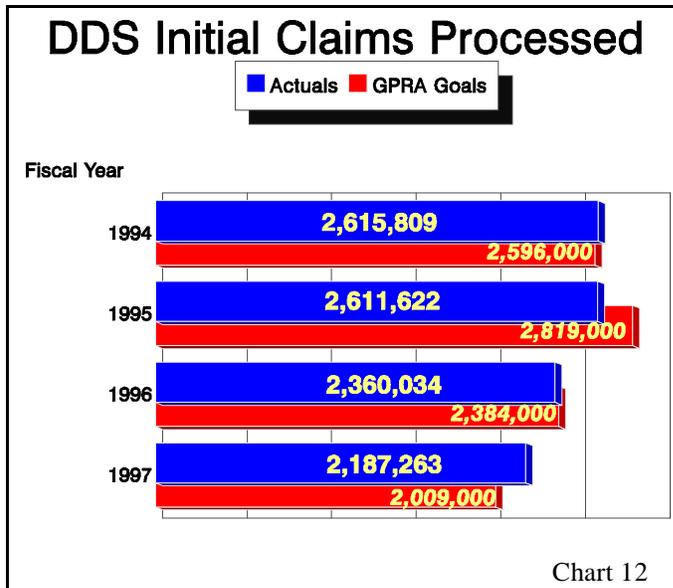
Observation

During FY 1997, SSA was able to exceed the GPRA goal by 25 percent.



The Disability Determination Services (DDS) will process at least 2,009,000 initial disability claims in FY 1997.

Through the outstanding efforts of SSA and State DDS employees throughout the country, SSA was able to achieve its GPRA goal of processing 2,009,000 initial disability determination cases. During FY 1997, initial disability claims receipts decreased by over 14 percent with an average DI claim taking approximately 86.5 days to process and an average SSI disability claim taking approximately 108.4 days to process. SSA continues to streamline the disability determination process. Efforts concentrate on streamlining the decision methodology to enable the current workforce to process disability claims more efficiently.

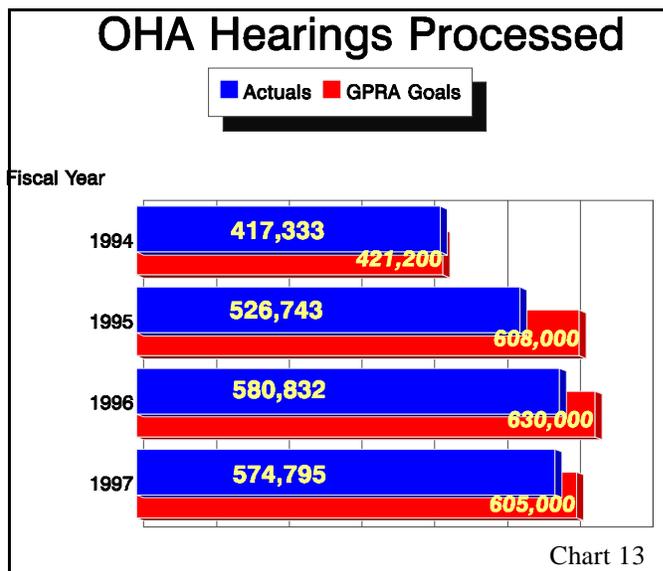


Observation

The DDSs exceeded the FY 1997 GPRA initial claims processing goal by over 178,000 claims. This helped reduce the initial disability cases pending by over 21 percent.

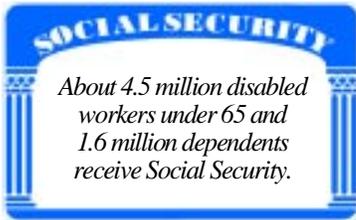
The Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA) will process at least 605,000 hearings in FY 1997.

Administrative Law Judges (ALJ) were able to act upon 54.3 percent of hearings cases received and pending from last year. This figure was 53.2 and 49.3 percent for FYs 1996 and 1995, respectively. Thus the number of cases pending at year end decreased by 5.3 percent from last year.



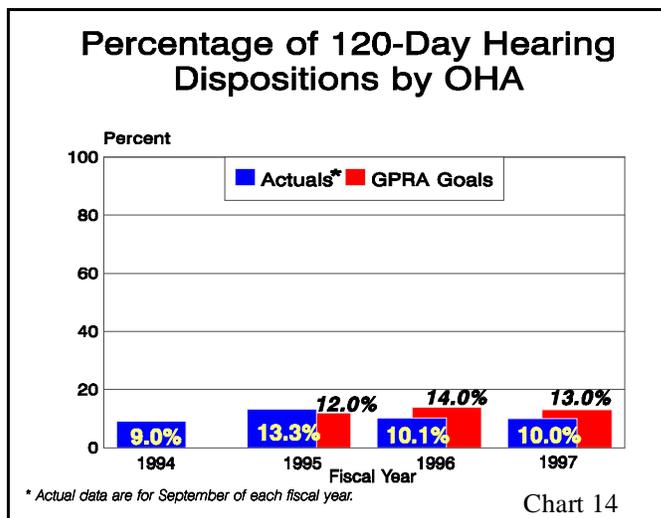
Observation

SSA was unable to meet the GPRA target of processing 605,000 hearings cases in FY 1997. However, the Agency did process 95 percent of the FY 1997 GPRA goal.



SSA will issue hearing level decisions and send notices to claimants within 120 days after filing date.

Hearing level dispositions issued within 120 days or less generally tend to be favorable decisions that can be issued on-the-record without a hearing or additional development of the record. Under initiatives tied to the Short Term Disability Project (STDP) in FYs 1995 through 1997, OHA has been able to identify and dispose of fully favorable cases earlier in the hearings process. OHA projects to dispose of an even greater number of cases within 120 days in FY 1998 and beyond, with implementation of Process Unification and national roll-out of the Adjudication Officer (AO) Program (see page 75 for more information on these initiatives).



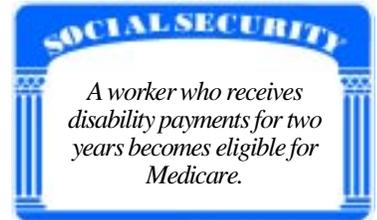
Observation

Although SSA was not able to achieve this FY 1997 GPRA goal, the Agency was able to reduce the end of year pendings for hearings by over 27,000 cases. However, the disposition percentage remained relatively static at 10.0 percent due to the age of the pending cases that were processed.

GOAL: Create a supportive environment for SSA employees.

Serving our customers well requires that SSA’s key resource, its employees, have a professional working environment that makes available the tools and resources its employees need to do their jobs effectively and efficiently. Beyond the concern with employees’ impact on service, however, lies SSA’s conviction that employees deserve opportunities for an enriching career. Technology advances can also present challenges to work-force management, and SSA is beginning to plan for the technological evolution of jobs to ensure that SSA can accommodate employees whose jobs are impacted by automation.

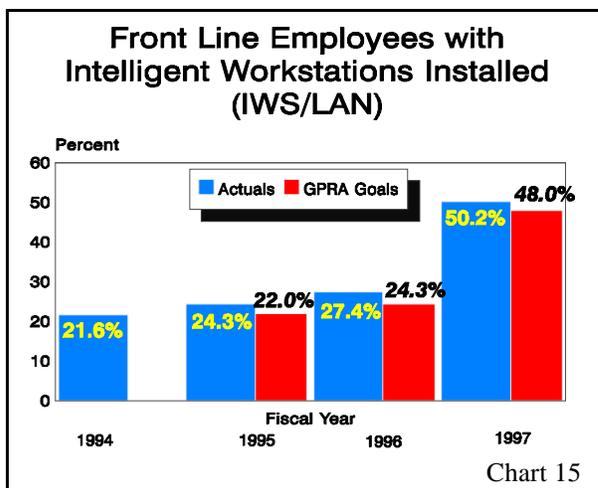
SSA values the contributions of employees to Agency decisionmaking and recognizes the importance of making Agency decisions at the lowest level possible in the organization. We are continuing our search for the best ways to ensure that employees have the latitude they need to perform their work effectively and efficiently and to remove the barriers that impede their ability to do so.



SSA will provide all employees with state of the art technology enabling them to work effectively and efficiently.

While the SSA workforce is SSA's most valuable asset, technology runs parallel in importance because it is essential to the effectiveness of that workforce, and indispensable to the success of the SSA business approach. SSA must meet growth in both customer expectations and workloads, and improve or maintain service while satisfying staffing and streamlining goals. To accomplish this, SSA must use enabling technology to support improved or dramatically altered processes which simplify, speed and eliminate tasks and free employee time for the more complex activities which are not susceptible to simplification or automation.

The Intelligent Workstation/Local Area Network (IWS/LAN) is the linchpin for both SSA's customer service program and its entire business approach. It will facilitate many of the planned productivity improvements and enable full reengineering of the disability process, including processing time reductions and other improvements projected in the redesign. IWS/LAN also will support continuous improvement efforts necessary to meet the expectations of our customers.

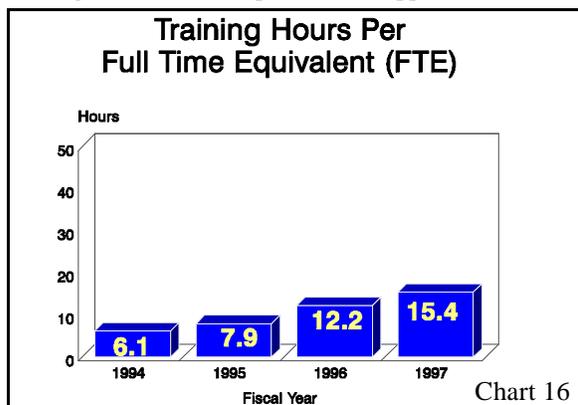


Observation

During FY 1997, SSA was able to increase the number of front line employees with IWS/LANs installed to 50.2 percent nearly doubling the number of employees with IWS/LAN technology. In doing so, we exceeded the FY 1997 goal by 2.2 percentage points.

SSA will provide adequate training to employees enabling them to perform their jobs knowledgeably and with confidence.

Ongoing investments in employee training and career development are crucial to maintaining an effective workforce. Streamlining initiatives have resulted in a number of employees redeploying to direct service positions from management and staff support jobs. The success of streamlining rests on the premise that employees will be well trained as they are redeployed to different work. Significant training is also flowing from process reengineering and continuous improvement automation efforts. For example, a multi-year, phased training approach is an integral part of the Disability Process Redesign Project and similar large training efforts are also planned in support of technology-based initiatives such as IWS/LAN.



Observation

During FY 1997, SSA's training hours per FTE increased by 26 percent from the FY 1996 performance; nearly double the FY 1995 figure. The increase was due in part to the large number of front line employees being upgraded to the ISW/LAN environment.

