



SSA Funding Needs Boost to Meet the Needs of People with Disabilities

The Social Security Administration (SSA) faces a customer service crisis after over a decade of tight budgets and record-high attrition during the COVID-19 pandemic. People with disabilities have experienced difficulties in accessing benefits, major delays in determinations, and poor customer service due to agency underfunding. The additional funding for SSA in the continuing resolution will not even keep up with fixed cost increases, let alone replace staffing losses from the past two years or improve service. The crisis at SSA will only worsen unless the agency is adequately funded for FY 2023.

Millions of People With Disabilities Receive SSA Administered Benefits

Approximately 7.6 million individuals with disabilities and older adults rely on the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program and another 9.6 million receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits as disabled workers, disabled widow(er)s, or disabled adult children. Unlike Social Security retirement, these programs come with complicated eligibility requirements that require agency determinations. The majority of individuals that apply are denied.

SSA Funding Has Not Kept Up With the Workload

The agency's administrative budget has not kept up with inflation or beneficiary demand. For FY 2022, SSA's operating budget only increased by \$275 million (2.5%), not enough to compensate for inflation. The additional funding in the FY 2023 continuing resolution (\$400 million, annualized), would not even keep up with increases in the agency's fixed costs, let alone allow the agency to replace staffing losses and improve service. SSA's operating budget is down 17%, after inflation, since 2010. At the same time, SSA's workloads have expanded dramatically. The number of Social Security beneficiaries has increased by 11 million, or 21%, since 2010, as the baby boom generation has aged.

Backlogs and Outdated IT Make Processing Claims Difficult

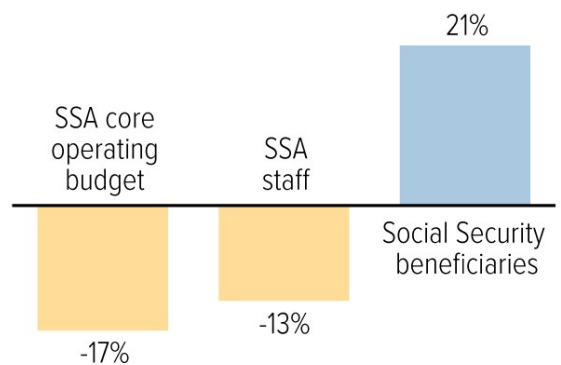
Over one million disability claims are pending at SSA. More people waiting for disability decisions, and longer waits for the decisions, are taking a toll on individuals, families, and communities. SSA's OIG has found that state Disability Determination Services are not able to keep pace with workloads, leading to increasing processing times and backlogs at all levels of the disability determination process. Nearly half of calls to SSA go unanswered because callers hang up when the wait is too long, or they get busy signals. Problems with a new telephone system make it even harder for callers to get the help they need.

SSA Experiencing Customer Service Crisis Due to Underfunding and Understaffing

SSA faces bigger challenges now than it did before the pandemic due to record-high staffing losses. SSA's FY22 appropriation leaves the agency few options. With its operating budget not keeping up with inflation, it will lose even more staff. Unable to hire more staff or ramp up overtime, wait times and backlogs will inevitably grow further. Policymakers can do more to ensure Social Security applicants and beneficiaries get the help they need. President Biden requested \$14.8 billion for SSA's limitation on administrative expenses (LAE) for FY23, which represents an increase of \$1.4 billion compared to FY22. We urge Congress to prioritize SSA during the upcoming appropriations process at a level to meet the current and future demands of the agency.

Social Security Administration Faces Increased Workload With Fewer Resources

Percent change from 2010 to 2022 (funding adjusted for inflation)



Note: For beneficiaries, figures reflect fiscal year 2010 to Apr. 2022; for staff, figures reflect full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) between fiscal years 2010 and 2021.

Source: CBPP analysis based on Social Security Administration and Office of Management and Budget

CENTER ON BUDGET AND POLICY PRIORITIES | CBPP.ORG