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*If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?*

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## **What steps to take in a Social Security Disability Claim**

The first thing you need to do is apply for Social Security disability benefits. Applications are taken at the local Social Security Administration offices. If you are applying for Social Security disability (SSDI) you can apply by phone, mail, on-line or in person. Your Lawyer or representative can also file your application. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) on the other hand must be done in person at a local Social Security office. Your claim for disability benefits will then be processed by Social Security field offices and state agencies. The Social Security field office will verify your age, marital status, employment and if you are covered under Social Security by paying into the system thru your taxes. The file is then sent to Disability Determination Services (DDS) to determine if you are medically disabled. The DDS is responsible for getting the medical information needed from your doctors and usually consultative examining doctors that are paid by the Social Security Administration. Once DDS determines they have enough medical evidence they will make the first decision if you are disabled. If you are found disabled the DDS will then send the file back to the Social Security field office to assess the amount of your disability benefits and will then begin paying those benefits. If the DDS finds you not disabled then the file is also sent back to the Social Security field office where the file waits to see if you appeal the decision. If you appeal the decision in some states you go to the process of reconsideration. This is basically a repeat of the above process. In other states if you appeal your initial denial you will go straight to the hearing stage before an administrative law judge. In states that have reconsideration if you are denied this second time you go to the hearing stage. Your case is now in another office called the Office of Hearing and Appeals (OHA). On a side note the Office of Hearings and Appeals is now called the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review or ODAR. The wait time for a hearing is long usually anywhere from 12-18 months and sometimes longer. If you win at this stage and your case is not reviewed by the Appeals Council it will be sent to local field office for payment. If you lose at this stage you can appeal the decision to the Appeals Council. The Appeals Council can deny your appeal, remand the case for another hearing, or find you disabled. If you lose at the Appeals Council your only recourse is to file civil action in United States Federal Court.

### ***SOCIAL SECURITY***

**News Release dated February 11, 2010**

Social Security Adds 38 New

**Compassionate Allowance Conditions**

Expansion Will Speed Benefits to Thousands of Americans with Disabilities

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today announced that the agency is adding 38 more conditions to its list of Compassionate Allowances. This is the first expansion since the original list of 50 conditions - 25 rare diseases and 25 cancers - was announced in October 2008. The new conditions range from adult brain disorders to rare diseases that primarily affect children. The complete list of the new Compassionate Allowance conditions is attached.

"The addition of these new conditions expands the scope of Compassionate Allowances to a broader subgroup of conditions like early-onset Alzheimer's disease," Commissioner Astrue said. "The expansion we are announcing today means tens of thousands of Americans with devastating disabilities will now get approved for benefits in a matter of days rather than months and years."

Compassionate Allowances are a way of quickly identifying diseases and other medical conditions that clearly qualify for Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability benefits. It allows the agency to electronically target and make speedy decisions for the most obviously disabled individuals. In developing the expanded list of conditions, Social Security held

public hearings and worked closely with the National Institutes of Health, the Alzheimer's Association, the National Organization for Rare Disorders, and other groups.

"The diagnosis of Alzheimer's indicates significant cognitive impairment that interferes with daily living activities, including the ability to work," said Harry Johns, President and CEO of the Alzheimer's Association. "Now, individuals who are dealing with the enormous challenges of Alzheimer's won't also have to endure the financial and emotional toll of a long disability decision process."

"This truly innovative program will provide invaluable assistance and support to patients and families coping with severely disabling rare diseases," said Peter L. Saltonstall, President and CEO of the National Organization for Rare Disorders (NORD). "On behalf of those patients and families, I want to thank Commissioner Astrue and his enthusiastic team for creating and now expanding a program that will have a direct impact on the quality of life of thousands of individuals."

"The initiative not only assists those whose applications are quickly processed, but also assists those whose applications need more time and attention from SSA adjudicators," said Marty Ford, Co-Chair, Social Security Task Force, Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities. "We are pleased to see today's expansion and look forward to working with Commissioner Astrue on further expansion of this decision-making tool and other ways to expedite determinations and decisions for disability claims."

"We will continue to hold hearings and look for other diseases and conditions that can be added to our list of Compassionate Allowances," Commissioner Astrue said. "There can be no higher priority than getting disability benefits quickly to those Americans with these severe and life-threatening conditions."

Social Security will begin electronically identifying these 38 new conditions March 1. For more information about the agency's Compassionate Allowances initiative, go to [www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances).