

Social Security Announces Nationwide Launch of Compassionate Allowances
Process Will Fast Track Applications For People with Cancers and
Rare Diseases-October 27, 2008

Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security, today announced the national rollout of the agency's Compassionate Allowances initiative, a way to expedite the processing of disability claims for applicants whose medical conditions are so severe that their conditions obviously meet Social Security's standards.

"Getting benefits quickly to people with the most severe medical conditions is both the right and the compassionate thing to do," Commissioner Astrue said. "This initiative will allow us to make decisions on these cases in a matter of days, rather than months or years."

Social Security is launching this expedited decision process with a total of 50 conditions. Over time, more diseases and conditions will be added. A list of the first 50 impairments -- 25 rare diseases and 25 cancers -- can be found at www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances. Before announcing this initiative, Social Security held public hearings to receive information from experts on rare diseases and cancers. The agency also enlisted the assistance of the National Institutes of Health.

Compassionate Allowances is the second piece of the agency's two-track, fast-track system for certain disability claims. When combined with the agency's Quick Disability Determination process, and once fully implemented, this two-track system could result in six to nine percent of disability claims, the cases for as much as a quarter million people, being decided in an average of six to eight days.

"This is an outstanding achievement for the Social Security Administration," said Peter Saltonstall, President of the National Organization for Rare Disorders. "It has taken Social Security less than a year to develop this much-needed program that will benefit those whose claims merit expedited consideration based on the nature of their disease. Disability backlogs cause a hardship for patients and their families. Commissioner Astrue and his staff deserve our thanks for a job well done."

"Unfortunately, many hardworking people with cancer may not only face intensive treatment to save their lives, but they may also find themselves truly unable to perform their daily work-related activities and as result, may face serious financial concerns, such as the loss of income and the cost of treatment," said Daniel E. Smith, president of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. "The Social Security Administration's Compassionate Allowances program will help streamline the disability benefits application process so that benefits are quickly provided to those who need them most."

"This is America, and it simply is not acceptable for people to wait years for a final decision on a disability claim," Commissioner Astrue said. "I am committed to a process that is as fair and speedy as possible. The launch of Compassionate Allowances is another step to ensuring Americans with disabilities, especially those with certain cancers and rare diseases, get the benefits they need quickly."

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