The Social Security Administration (SSA)

Quality Review Process

SOAR providers work hard to submit complete quality applications to the SSA and Disability Determination Services (DDS). In that same spirit, SSA works to ensure that Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) applications are reviewed fairly and accurately. There are multiple levels of quality review at both the SSA and DDS. It is important to understand how those quality review procedures have the potential to affect the applicants with whom you are working.

# Disability Quality Branches

SSA’s Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment reviews a continuing sample of DDS determinations in the Disability Quality Branches (DQB) of the ten SSA regions. They do this by randomly pulling cases that are currently being processed or have already been completed. For cases that have already been decided, both approvals and denials are pulled.

These DQBs work to ensure that DDS determinations are made correctly and consistently, and that examiners assessing disability claims follow all policies and procedures when making decisions whether to approve or deny SSI/SSDI claims.

# DQB and SOAR Applications

Understanding this process is important for SOAR practitioners because a quality review will increase the processing time of an application. It can take weeks, or even months, for SSA to review each “pulled” case, depending on its complexity.

After review, cases are often sent back to the original case processor to be reviewed and adjusted based on the DQBs comments. One of the ways examiners are evaluated is based on the number of cases that they get “returned.”

If you learn that a case you are working on has been “pulled” for review, you will want to explain this in simple terms to the applicant. It is important that applicants are aware of the status of their case at all times. Additionally, you may want to explain the situation to any other service providers who are working with the applicant as the delay may affect their access to services, especially housing.

While there is nothing that can be done to speed up the quality review process, having close working relationships and communication with your local SSA office is always valuable.