

Expanded Compassionate Allowances List Shrinks SSA Applicant's Wait

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This year the Social Security Administration (SSA) added 25 more conditions to its Compassionate Allowances Program list (CAL) which affects individuals who are applying for disability benefits from Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income Programs. This is in addition to the 35 conditions added in December 2012, bringing the total number of serious disabilities listed to 225.

Why is this significant? For persons diagnosed with disorders named on the Compassionate Allowances list, the SSA expedites the lengthy claims process because of the severity of the illnesses. It is understandable that time is of the essence when an adult or a child is suffering through a debilitating or life-threatening condition.

There is no difference in the application process. However, when the agency receives a claim with one of the listed conditions, it's fast tracked through the system in order to provide a determination within weeks rather than months or years. The benefits received as a result can make a world of difference to the disabled person's quality of life and care.

No one plans to have a catastrophic illness, like congestive heart failure or Alzheimer's Disease. Yet when disability strikes, it usually takes a huge toll on a person's or family's time and finances. For instance, an adult child quits her job to stay home and care for an ill parent; an employed person who has had a heart attack often can no longer work, and therefore can't pay his bills. These are just two examples of an incapacitating illness's numerous consequences.

How does the agency determine which ailments to include on the CAL? It researches the National Institutes of Health, conducts public outreach hearings. Using the comments collected from them and medical and scientific experts' advice, the agency expands the list as necessary.

Though many of the illnesses listed by the CAL are rare, like Joubert Syndrome, a genetic disorder affecting intellectual and developmental capacities, others on the list include Leukemia, Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma, Pancreatic, Ovarian and Prostate cancers, and dementia associated with Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Huntington's diseases. To see the full list, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/compassionateallowances/conditions.htm>.

Additionally this year, the agency will begin fast tracking applications from veterans considered 100 percent disabled by the Department of Veterans Affairs. In a statement from the acting SSA Commissioner Carolyn W. Colvin, she said that "We have reached another milestone for those who have sacrificed so much for our country and this process ensures they will get the benefits they need quickly." SSA benefits for vets are awarded in addition to disability compensation awarded by VA.

When time is of the essence, expert legal advice could make an important difference in the speed and efficiency of the SSA's determination. Receiving these vital benefits can improve the care of a person suffering from a devastating illness.