

Panel Two: Structural Reforms

- “Transitional Benefits for a Subset of the SSDI Population” Kim Hildred, presenter
- “SSDI Reforms to Improve Societal Wealth and Labor Force Participation” Jason Fichner, presenter
- “Exploring Alternative Definitions of Disability” Neil Jacobson, presenter

- Discussant Art Spencer

Structural reforms – Similar themes (1)

- Some Similar Themes within the papers
 - Emphasis on SSDI as a Temporary income replacement (“transitional benefits” leading to RTW)
 - Emphasis on Continuing Reviews (CDRs)
 - Maintain applicant ties to the workplace and shorten the time removed from work while applying for SSDI
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Structural reforms – Similar themes (2)

- Allow beneficiaries to work without a limit on earnings (as they medically improve and engage in rehabilitation)
 - Pilot to create the final operational processes
 - Most beneficiaries can work, especially with appropriate workplace accommodation and support
 - Therefore focus on work capacity rather than incapacity
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Structural reforms – Unique Details (1)

- And yet some unique details exist among the papers
 - Should some benefits be “partial” as well as temporary?
 - Should the employer directly finance the first years of disability benefits?
 - Impact of unemployment and economic shocks on SSDI applications
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Structural reforms – Unique Details (2)

- Are all benefits temporary, or just for a small subset of beneficiaries?
 - Decision for placement in “Temp” benefits class is or is not appealable?
 - Modify the Definition of Disability to remove ‘tie’ to the ability to work. SSDI is rather an offset for the extra costs of disability
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Structural reforms – Some Cautions and reminders (1)

- Program and Administrative costs and savings. Saving Program monies does not increase the funding available to administer the program
 - Operational Realities. A complex program is more expensive to run
 - Example – suggesting the VA Benefits program as a model for SSDI forgets recent VA history with backlogs, costs, and never-ending appeals
 - When looking at Temporary Disability alternatives, remember to review the programs in RI, NY, NJ, CA, and HI
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Structural reforms – Some Cautions and reminders (2)

- ❑ Use Caution when suggesting that RFC is a good model for an individualized functional assessment
 - ❑ Generally Use Caution when assuming ALJ Corps compliance
 - ❑ Care must be taken when deciding what administrative decisions are or are not appealable
 - ❑ Significant inter-agency cooperation and collaboration is an integral part of these papers, perhaps more than should be expected in our bureaucratic reality
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Structural reforms – Some Cautions and reminders (3)

- SSA research suggests that many beneficiaries attempt a RTW, but few work for long and few maintain SGA
 - These papers appropriately assume beneficiary cooperation in medical and vocational improvement efforts.
 - But what if they don't?
 - And are there limits to what can be undertaken?
 - Finally, while certainly a bigger issue than only SSDI, is the 'real' issue here: What should be the economic safety net be for all Americans?
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