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
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
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
- 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
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.
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
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?