

Why does it take so long to receive a decision on my SSDI/SSI claim?

Initial Level

There are multiple steps in the SSDI/SSI application process. When you submit your initial application to the Social Security Administration (SSA), your claim is “developed” by an SSA employee known as an “adjudicator.” It is the adjudicators responsibility to request your medical records, send you the necessary paperwork, and request further medical exams (if necessary). This process takes between 4 to 6 months to complete and issue a decision. You can help this process move along by having your treating doctor’s information available when you complete your initial application, updating your adjudicator (or your attorney who will update the adjudicator) of any new treatment, and completing and returning the forms sent to you in a timely manner. Sometimes the adjudicators will ask for your assistance in obtaining your medical records from your treating doctors. If you are comfortable doing so, contacting your doctors yourself can help ensure that they send over the medical records that SSA needs to make a determination on your claim.

Hearing Level

If your application is denied at the initial level, you can appeal that decision. In most states, your appeal is a request for a hearing in front of an administrative law judge (ALJ). [Wait times for a hearing has grown greatly over the last few years.](#)

The average wait times are:

PA: 21-25 months

NJ: 22-25 months

DE: 20 months

These wait times are from the time that you file an appeal until the time that your hearing occurs.

SSA recognizes that these wait times are absurd and has been working to reduce them; however, there are only so many hearing rooms and judges available to hear the cases.

After your hearing

After your hearing with the ALJ, the Judge will review all of the medical evidence and your testimony and will issue his/her decision in writing. The Judge's decisions average 10-20 pages in length and must be very thorough. The typical wait time for a written decision from the Judge is approximately 3 to 6 months after the hearing date.