



## SSI for Children Mailer Outreach – Impact Evaluation



**Office of Analytics, Review, and Oversight**  
Working Together to Use the Power of Knowledge

**September 2023**

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# SSI for Children Mailer Outreach – Impact Evaluation

August 2023

Office of Analytics and Improvements Report Summary

## Project Objective

To determine the effectiveness of this pilot mailing in Pennsylvania and to inform decisions on whether we should pursue similar initiatives with other states.

## Background

SSA communicates SSI program information with the public through various means, including direct mailings. Since October 2020, the Office of Data Exchange, Policy Publication, and International Negotiations (ODEPPIN) met with various federal, state, and private industry partners and reinitiated the Data Exchange Community of Excellence, a strategic partnership with external partners, to establish data exchange agreements that would identify children who may be eligible for SSI.

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (PA DHS) agreed to pilot a targeted outreach using state Medicaid data, without data sharing, as both PA DHS and SSA determined there was no legal authority to share data for this purpose. PA DHS created a dataset of 6,179 potentially eligible SSI child recipients. PA DHS agreed to send, at its cost, an initial mailing to 500 households. They later released mailings to the remaining dataset 5,679. This report details findings of the analysis SSA performed on the initial cohort of 500 cases for which we had available data.

## Findings at a Glance

The Social Security Administration (SSA) evaluated this effort to determine:

- Did the project reach the target group?
- Were the activities implemented as intended? If not, why?
- What was the ultimate outcome of the effort—i.e., did children receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits?
- Did we identify an unmet need?
- Are initiative collaborators satisfied that the project accomplished its objectives?
- How the level of effort/outcome compared to other SSI outreach initiatives?
- Is the process and outreach information suitable for expansion to other states?

The target population for this mailer was parents or guardians of children (<18 years old) within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania receiving Medicaid, but not receiving SSI benefits. In addition, the target population was limited to Medicaid recipients determined to have one of five specific chronic medical conditions which are common among SSI Children ([see Methodology](#)).

The mailer provided recipients with two options to apply for SSI: visit [www.ssa.gov/ssikids](http://www.ssa.gov/ssikids) or call our toll-free number. Data was collected on the number of calls to the dedicated number. However, no data was collected for visits to the website. Of the 500 initial mailings, we were able to identify 33 inquiries to SSA via the dedicated number listed on the mailer about SSI Childhood Disability benefits. Of the 33 inquiries, 16 applications were received, 3 were approved, 10 were medically denied, and 3 were non-medically denied due to excess income and resources. Presumably, the remaining contacts elected not to apply after discussing eligibility with the SSA technician.

PA DHS identified 6,179 potentially eligible SSI child recipients. As of August 2023, PA DHS's data indicated a reduction of 303 children who are now eligible for SSI benefits. However, while this reduction occurred during the initiative, they cannot make conclusory statements that it is because of the initiative.

## Recommendation

We recommend referring to these initial results in combination with results from other initiatives when considering efforts to increase the number of children receiving SSI benefits.

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## Objective

The goal of this effort was to determine the effectiveness of this pilot mailing in Pennsylvania and to inform decisions whether we should pursue similar initiatives with other states.

## Background

The SSI program provides monthly payments to adults and children with a disability or blindness who have income and resources below specific financial limits. SSA communicates SSI program information with the public through various means, including direct mailings. The PA DHS created a dataset of potentially eligible SSI child recipients. This dataset was composed of children receiving Medicaid but not receiving SSI benefits, determined to have one of five specific chronic medical conditions which are common among SSI Children (see Methodology). Since SSA and PA DHS have previously determined that a data exchange was not a viable option, PA DHS agreed to send, at its cost, an initial mailer to 500 households in August 2022 and subsequently the remaining 5,679 in November 2022. The Office of Analytics and Improvements (OAI) performed analysis on the initial cohort of 500 cases.

SSA evaluated this effort using a process evaluation to help answer questions such as:

- Did the project reach the target group?
- Were the activities implemented as intended? If not, why?
- What was the ultimate outcome of the effort—i.e., did children receive SSI benefits?
- Did we identify an unmet need?
- Were initiative collaborators satisfied that the project accomplished its objectives satisfactorily?
- How did the level of effort/outcome compare to other SSI outreach initiatives?
- Is the process and outreach information suitable for expansion to other states?

## Methodology

PA DHS developed a total dataset of 6,179 cases targeting parents or guardians of children (<18 years old) within Pennsylvania who were not receiving SSI benefits. PA DHS used Medicaid financial eligibility to exclude households whose income amounts would make them unlikely to be financially eligible for SSI. Additional criteria were used to search for those who met the Medicaid “chronic condition” criteria and had the following conditions listed within PA DHS’s Electronic Data Warehouse:

- Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder;
- Autistic or other pervasive development disorder;
- Speech and language delays;
- Intellectual disability/learning disorder; or
- Affective/mood disorder.

Although the mailer provided recipients two options to apply for SSI, visit [www.ssa.gov/ssikids](http://www.ssa.gov/ssikids) or to call our toll-free number, the evaluation plan only included the collection of data via the dedicated phone line. The evaluation included the collection of the following primary data elements:

- SSNs of children whose parent/guardian called SSA;
- Date of call/initial contact;

- Count of calls SSA receives related to the mailer;
- Count of callers who report to SSA that they previously called advocates;
- Count of appointments made; and
- Count of calls advocates receive related to the mailer.

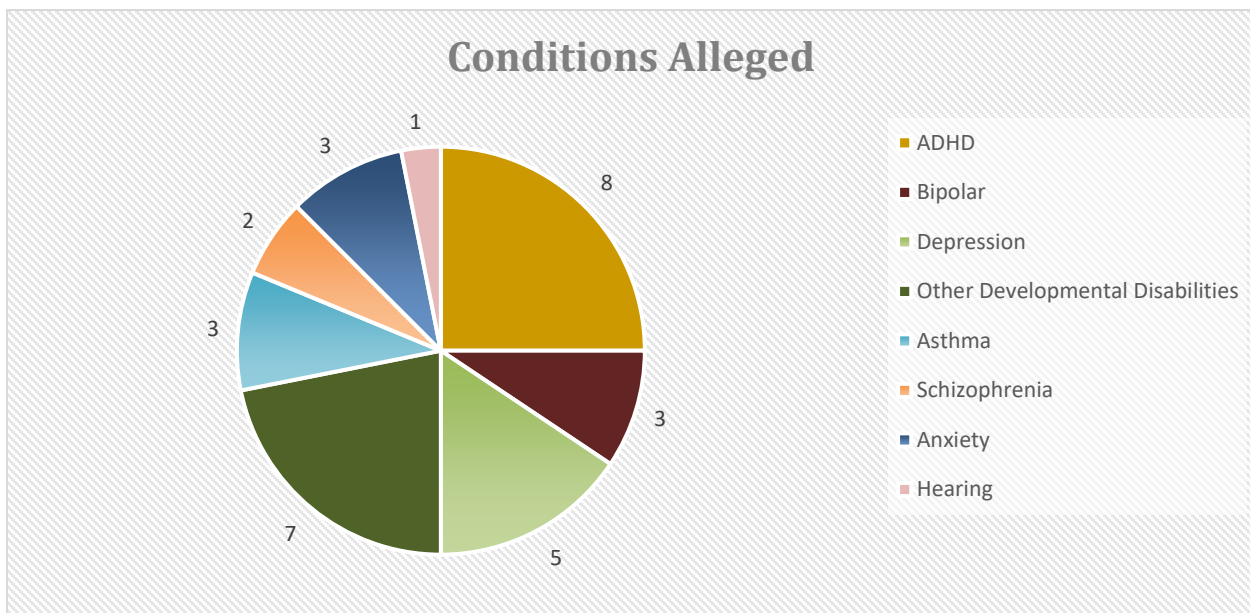
At the end of the initiative, in addition to SSA performing analysis of data collected, PA DHS agreed to run their file to provide analysis of the mailers’ effectiveness and to determine how many children are now receiving SSI benefits.

## Findings

We were able to identify 33 inquiries to SSA about SSI Childhood Disability benefits connected with the 500 initial mailings as of July 2023. Of the 33 inquiries, 16 applications were received. Each applicant who filed a claim alleged one of the above-mentioned targeted chronic conditions.

### Conditions Alleged

Among the 16 applications received, a total of 35 conditions were alleged, with each applicant alleging two to four conditions. The chart below depicts distribution of these allegations.



### Approvals

- Three of 16 cases were approved for benefits;
- All the approved cases were from first time filers; and
- The primary condition for two of the approvals was Depression Bipolar & Related Disorders and the primary condition for the third approval was ADHD.

Approved Conditions	
Primary Condition	Secondary Condition
2960 - Depression Bipolar & Related Disorders	3120 – Impulsive Control Disorder
2960 - Depression Bipolar & Related Disorders	3000 – Anxiety and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders
3140 – ADHD	3138 – Oppositional Defiant Disorder

### ***Denials***

- Thirteen of 16 cases were denied;
  - Three of 13 were non-medically denied (excess income/resources and citizenship); and
  - Ten of 13 were medically denied.
- All medically denied claims alleged at least one of the targeted chronic conditions.

### ***Other Data***

- Six of 16 applicants had previously applied for SSI benefits; all six were denied again.
- Four of 16 applications we received (1 approved applicant and 3 denied applicants) had multiple family members (e.g., multiple children) who were either already receiving benefits or who had applied for them previously and were denied.

### ***Management Information (MI)***

SSA MI is only available on the initial 500 mailers since those mailer recipients used the dedicated phone line which allowed technicians to flag the cases.

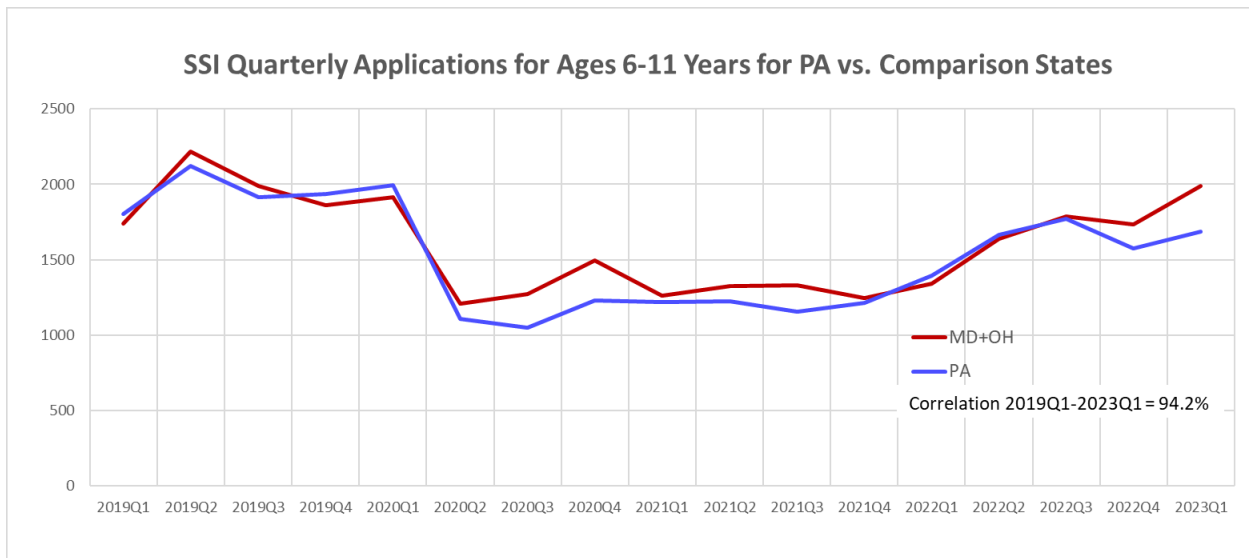
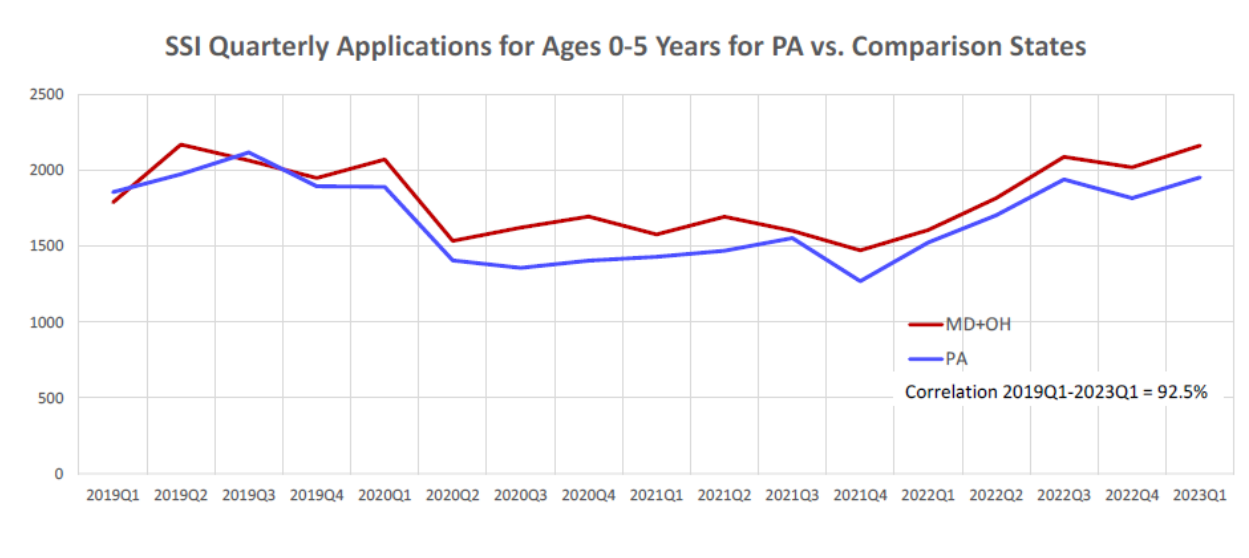
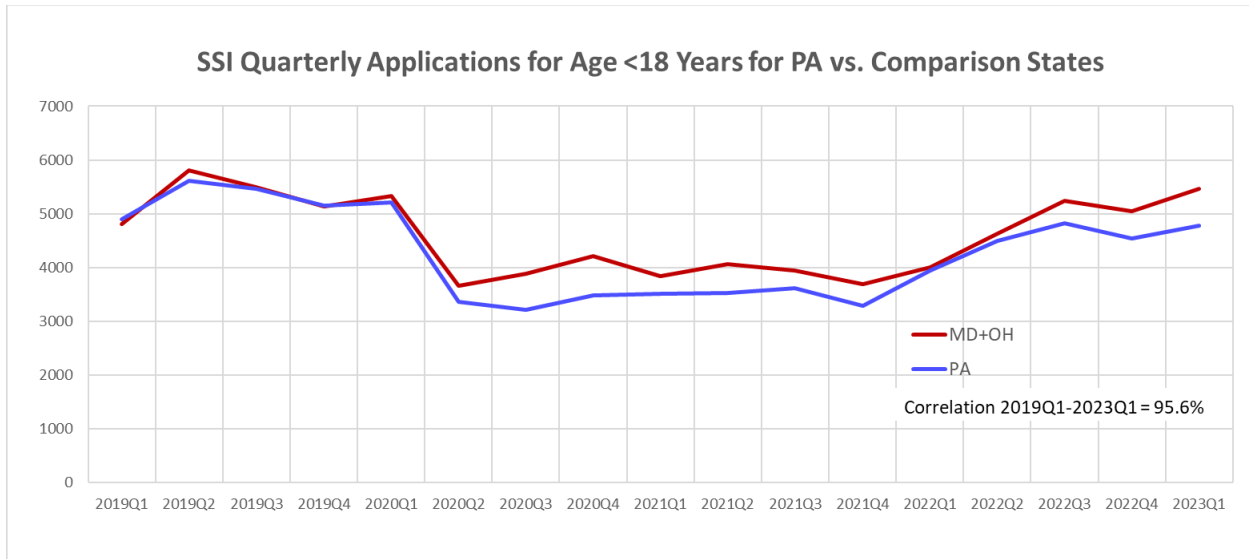
<b>SSI Children's Mailer Outreach (PA)</b>	
Results as of July 2023	
Mailers Sent	500 notices
Calls Answered	33 calls (6.6% of mailers)
Appointments Established	26 appointments (5.2% of mailers)
Applications Taken	16 (3.2% of mailers)
Applications Approved	3 (0.6 % of mailers)
Applications Denied	13 (2.6% of mailers)
Approval Rate	18.75%
Average New SSI Benefits	\$1071.00 per month
Total SSI Benefits Paid	\$7,026.00

For MI on the larger mailing of 5,679, we are reliant on PA DHS to determine how many children are now receiving SSI benefits. Since it could take over six months for a disability determination, PA DHS agreed to re-run this data to determine if there was a reduction of recipients in their records. In August 2023, PA DHS conducted analysis comparing their original dataset of 6,179 of potentially eligible SSI child recipients to their current rolls. The outcome indicated a reduction of 303 children who are now eligible for SSI benefits. However, while this reduction occurred during the initiative, they cannot make conclusory statements that it is because of the initiative.

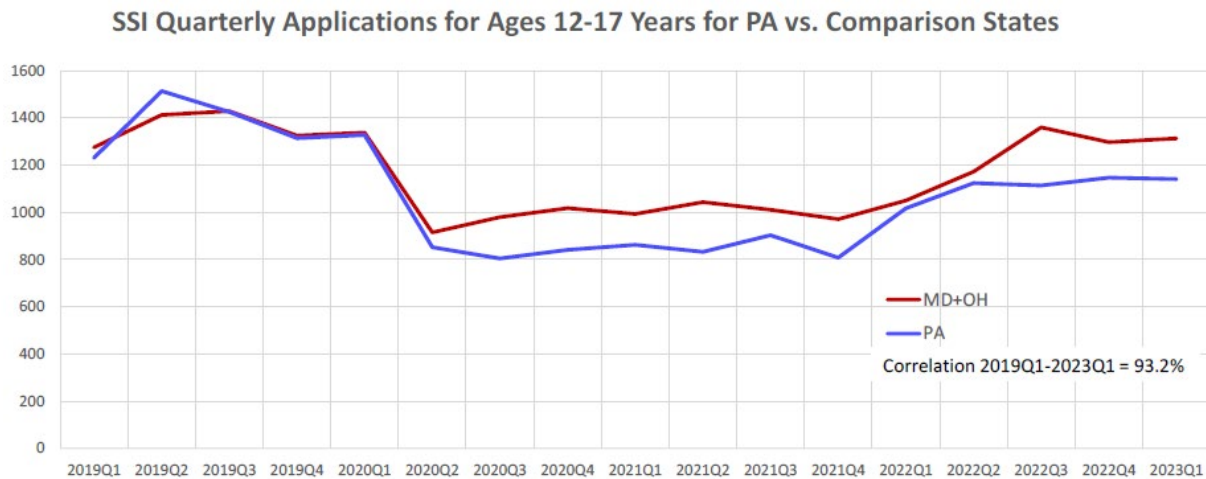
### ***Baseline Comparison***

In April and July 2023, SSA performed a baseline comparison of overall application volumes over time by comparing shifts/trends in PA to those in OH and MD. Because OH and MD are, as compared to PA, similarly sized neighboring states, they are expected to show similar trends in changes to SSI application rates.

The analysis compared overall children's applications as well as applications within subsets of the following ages: 0 – 5 years; 6 – 11 years; and 12 – 17 years. The charts below depict the trends.







There were no significant changes in the overall application trends for PA, relative to MD and OH, in the period after the mailings were sent, from April to July 2023.

## Conclusion

Despite the limited data available, we made the following conclusions regarding the questions identified above:

- **Did the project reach the target group?**

The agency received 33 calls to the dedicated phone line as a result of the 500 mailers sent. PA DHS indicated 303 children were removed from their rolls due to SSI eligibility. However, while this reduction occurred during the initiative, they cannot make conclusory statements that it is because of the initiative.

- **Were the activities implemented as intended? If not, why?**

Yes. The PA DHS sent mailers as agreed.

- **What was the ultimate outcome of the effort—i.e., did children receive SSI benefits?**

- We received 33 calls and established 26 appointments.
- Of the 26 appointments, 16 applications were filed.
- One call (seeking to better understand the letter) was placed to the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network's statewide housing hotline.
- Three children of 500 were found eligible to SSI benefits as result of this mailer based on SSA data collection.
- PA DHS' rolls were reduced by 303 due to SSI eligibility. However, while this reduction occurred during the initiative, they cannot make conclusory statements that it is because of the initiative.

- **Did we identify if there was an unmet need?**
  - Based on the low response rate, we are unsure if there was an unmet need.
- **Were initiative collaborators satisfied that the project accomplished its objectives satisfactorily?**

Lack of data sharing between SSA and PA limited the study and SSA's ability to evaluate the result.

- **How did the level of effort/outcome compare to other SSI outreach initiatives?**

While data sharing agreements have prevented deeper dive analysis, we believe outreach efforts have been successful in alerting the public to their potential eligibility to SSI benefits.

- **Was the process and outreach information suitable for expansion to other states?**

Process and outreach information are examined as part of the agency's overall communications and outreach planning, with information and data on individual efforts used to inform decisions about how best to balance competing outreach channels and requirements versus available resources. This initiative with PA required a significant level of effort and allowed SSA to identify legal impediments to data sharing if the process were to expand to other states.

## Recommendation

We recommend referring to these results in combination with results from other initiatives when considering efforts to increase the number of children receiving SSI benefits.

## Appendix A – Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for Children Factsheet



### Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for Children

#### Your Child with a Disability May Be Eligible for Monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Payments

Children under age 18 may get monthly payments if they have a disability and if the household has limited income and resources. If you care for a child who may be eligible, you should contact Social Security right away.

##### How does Social Security define “disabled?”

- Your child must have a physical or mental condition(s) that seriously limits their activities.
- The condition(s) must have lasted, or be expected to last, at least one year or result in death.

##### How does Social Security decide if my child has a qualifying disability?

- The Pennsylvania Bureau of Disability Determination (BDD) makes the disability decision for Social Security for residents of Pennsylvania.
- BDD will review the information you give Social Security and ask for information from doctors, school records, and other people who know about your child.
- If BDD needs more information, they will arrange an examination or test for your child. Social Security will pay for the exam and some related travel costs.

##### How do I apply for SSI for my child?

Visit our website to learn if your child may qualify. Tell us you want to apply or help someone else apply using the following:

- Visit [www.ssa.gov/ssikids](http://www.ssa.gov/ssikids) to request an appointment to apply. It only takes 5-10 minutes to provide basic information online about you and the child, and no documentation is required.
- **Our Toll-free Number**  
Call us at **1-800-772-1213** (TTY **1-800-325-0778**) to make an appointment to apply. Please have your child's Social Security number when you call.

##### How will I know Social Security's decision on my child's claim?

Social Security will send you a letter. It can take on average three to six months to decide your child's SSI claim. Let Social Security know if your address or telephone number changes so they can get in touch with you.