

in this section to test modifications to our disability determination process. These modifications will enable us to test, either individually or in one or more combinations, the effect of: having disability claim managers assume primary responsibility for processing an application for disability benefits; providing persons who have applied for benefits based on disability with the opportunity for an interview with a decisionmaker when the decisionmaker finds that the evidence in the file is insufficient to make a fully favorable determination or requires an initial determination denying the claim; having a single decisionmaker make the initial determination with assistance from medical consultants, where appropriate; and eliminating the reconsideration step in the administrative review process and having a claimant who is dissatisfied with the initial determination request a hearing before an administrative law judge. The model procedures we test will be designed to provide us with information regarding the effect of these procedural modifications and enable us to decide whether and to what degree the disability determination process would be improved if they were implemented on a national level.

(b) *Procedures for cases included in the tests.* Prior to commencing each test or group of tests in selected site(s), we will publish a notice in the **Federal Register**. The notice will describe which model or combinations of models we intend to test, where the specific test site(s) will be, and the duration of the test(s). The individuals who participate in the test(s) will be randomly assigned to a test group in each site where the tests are conducted. Paragraphs (b) (1) through (4) of this section lists descriptions of each model.

(1) In the disability claim manager model, when you file an application for benefits based on disability, a disability claim manager will assume primary responsibility for the processing of your claim. The disability claim manager will be the focal point for your contacts with us during the claims intake process and until an initial determination on your claim is made. The disability claim manager will explain the disability programs to you, including the definition of disability and how we determine whether you meet all the requirements for benefits based on disability. The disability claim manager will explain what you will be asked to do throughout the claims process and how you can obtain information or assistance through him or her. The disability claim manager will also provide you with information regarding

your right to representation, and he or she will provide you with appropriate referral sources for representation. The disability claim manager may be either a State agency employee or a Federal employee. In some instances, the disability claim manager may be assisted by other individuals.

(2) In the single decisionmaker model, the decisionmaker will make the disability determination and may also determine whether the other conditions for entitlement to benefits based on disability are met. The decisionmaker will make the disability determination after any appropriate consultation with a medical or psychological consultant. The medical or psychological consultant will not be required to sign the disability determination forms we use to have the State agency certify the determination of disability to us (see § 404.1615). However, before an initial determination is made that a claimant is not disabled in any case where there is evidence which indicates the existence of a mental impairment, the decisionmaker will make every reasonable effort to ensure that a qualified psychiatrist or psychologist has completed the medical portion of the case review and any applicable residual functional capacity assessment pursuant to our existing procedures (see § 404.1617). In some instances the decisionmaker may be the disability claim manager described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section. When the decisionmaker is a State agency employee, a team of individuals that includes a Federal employee will determine whether the other conditions for entitlement to benefits are met.

(3) In the predecision interview model, if the decisionmaker(s) finds that the evidence in your file is insufficient to make a fully favorable determination or requires an initial determination denying your claim, a predecision notice will be mailed to you. The notice will tell you that, before the decisionmaker(s) makes an initial determination about whether you are disabled, you may request a predecision interview with the decisionmaker(s). The notice will also tell you that you may submit additional evidence. You must request a predecision interview within 10 days after the date you receive the predecision notice. You must also submit any additional evidence within 10 days after you receive the predecision notice. If you request a predecision interview, the decisionmaker(s) will conduct the predecision interview in person, by videoconference, or by telephone as the decisionmaker(s) determines is appropriate under the circumstances. If

you make a late request for a predecision interview, or submit additional evidence late, but show in writing that you had good cause under the standards in § 404.911 for missing the deadline, the decisionmaker(s) will extend the deadline. If you do not request the predecision interview, or if you do not appear for a scheduled predecision interview and do not submit additional evidence, or if you do not respond to our attempts to communicate with you, the decisionmaker(s) will make an initial determination based upon the evidence in your file. If you identify additional evidence during the predecision interview, which was previously not available, the decisionmaker(s) will advise you to submit the evidence. If you are unable to do so, the decisionmaker(s) may assist you in obtaining it. The decisionmaker(s) also will advise you of the specific timeframes you have for submitting any additional evidence identified during the predecision interview. If you have no treating source(s) (see § 404.1502), or your treating source(s) is unable or unwilling to provide the necessary evidence, or there is a conflict in the evidence that cannot be resolved through evidence from your treating source(s), the decisionmaker(s) may arrange a consultative examination or resolve conflicts according to existing procedures (see § 404.1519a). If you attend the predecision interview, or do not attend the predecision interview but you submit additional evidence, the decisionmaker(s) will make an initial determination based on the evidence in your file, including the additional evidence you submit or the evidence obtained as a result of the predecision notice or interview, or both.

(4) In the reconsideration elimination model, we will modify the disability determination process by eliminating the reconsideration step of the administrative review process. If you receive an initial determination on your claim for benefits based on disability, and you are dissatisfied with the determination, we will notify you that you may request a hearing before an administrative law judge. If you request a hearing before an administrative law judge, we will apply our usual procedures contained in subpart J of this part.

#### **PART 416—SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME FOR THE AGED, BLIND, AND DISABLED**

Subpart N is amended as follows:

1. The authority citation for subpart N of part 416 continues to read as follows: