

Disability Benefit Receipt by State and County, 1970-2018: Description and Dataset

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Key Findings and Policy Implications

This paper describes newly digitized county-level data on SSDI receipt rates from 1970 to 2018, and SSI receipt rates from 1974-2018. The data were compiled from historical SSA publications, including *Social Security Beneficiaries by State and County*, *OASDI Beneficiaries by State and County*, and *SSI Recipients by State and County*. The paper finds that:

- The average SSDI receipt rate increases from 1.6% of the working-age population in 1970 to 6% in 2013 and is relatively flat thereafter. There is significant variation in SSDI receipt across counties with maximum rates as high as 10 percent in early years and as high as 20 percent in later years.
- The average SSI receipt rate increases from 2% of the working-age population in 1975 to 4% in 2012 and is flat thereafter. There is also county-level variation in SSI receipt across counties; with maximum rates as high as 20 percent or more since 1995.
- Counties with comparatively high SSDI or SSI receipt rates tend to remain so over time, even as the overall numbers in the programs grew substantially. Particularly high SSDI rates were found in selected counties in Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Alabama. Particularly high SSI rates were found in selected counties of Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, Alabama and other predominantly southern states.
- The proportion of county-level variation in SSDI receipt rates occurring within states, as opposed to across states, dropped from two-thirds in 1990 to less than 60 percent in later years. State factors became increasingly important over the last two decades.

The value of the county-level data to policy-related research is its ability to explore the sources of variation that may result from state-level influences, socioeconomic and demographic factors, labor market considerations and other factors.

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