

**SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
707 N. GRAND AVENUE, FLOOR 1
WAUKESHA, WI 53186-4844**

**Social Security Column
April 26, 2012**

**FASTER DISABILITY APPROVAL FOR PEOPLE WITH ALS
By Renee Bannier
Social Security District Manager in Waukesha, WI**

May is National ALS Awareness Month. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), more commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease, is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that attacks nerve cells and pathways in the brain and spinal cord. More than 5,600 people each year are newly diagnosed with ALS. As many as 30,000 Americans may currently be affected by this fatal condition. Social Security can help.

People who have ALS meet the medical qualifications for Social Security disability benefits. ALS is one of Social Security's "Compassionate Allowances." The complete list of Compassionate Allowances conditions can be found at www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances.

The Compassionate Allowances initiative identifies claims where the nature of the applicant's disease or condition clearly meets the statutory standard for disability. With the help of sophisticated new information technology, the agency can quickly identify potential Compassionate Allowances and then quickly make decisions and begin monthly benefit payments.

Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue made the Compassionate Allowances initiative a top priority soon after he began his tenure as Commissioner in 2007. Social Security launched the Compassionate Allowances program in 2008 with a list of 50 diseases and conditions. There are now more than 100 Compassionate Allowances conditions — and counting. Commissioner Astrue's dedication to Compassionate Allowances has earned him a humanitarian award and the attention of President Obama.

"Commissioner Astrue has worked tirelessly to ensure that disabled Americans receive the Social Security disability benefits they've earned in a timely way," said President Obama.

We develop the list of Compassionate Allowances conditions from information received at public outreach hearings, comments received from the disability community, counsel of medical and scientific experts, and research with the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Also, we consider which conditions are most likely to meet our definition of disability.

For more information on the Compassionate Allowances initiative, please visit www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances.

#