

# Outstanding Government Service



## **JACKI RUSSELL**

Department of Health and  
Human Services,  
Division of Disability  
Determination Services

When Jacki Russell was hired as director of the Division of Disability Determination Services (DDS) within the Department of Health and Human Services in 2018, she was challenged to lead a perennially under-resourced, federal-state hybrid organization facing competing challenges. Russell came out swinging and has led DDS with a clear vision and tireless work, transforming North Carolina's DDS into one of the highest-performing organizations of its kind in the nation, according to the Social Security Administration's Atlanta Region Center for Disability and Program Support.

Russell overcame a host of daunting difficulties: high vacancy rates, outdated technology, a growing backlog of unreviewed disability claims and long-neglected facility maintenance concerns. From her first day, Russell's priority was her staff's safety. Her negotiations with the building owner led to the completion of extensive renovations including a new roof. Another priority for Russell was improving workplace culture. Russell rolled out a now-annual survey from which new programs and practices were developed to encourage a healthy work-life balance and cultivate a mutual sense of support among coworkers.

To address staff shortages and the large disability claims backlogs, Russell advocated for additional federal funding to increase salaries.



She developed a targeted recruitment plan to identify and hire staff roles key to the review process, like medical and psychological consultants. She set achievable goals to reduce processing times for claims review and provided the tools and training her staff needed to meet those goals. Russell's efforts were successful; per the Social Security Administration, North Carolina DDS cleared the eighth-highest number of total workload cases in the nation in the 2022 fiscal year.

Jacki Russell's solutions-oriented commitment to the staff of DDS has reshaped the division's culture transforming it into a high-performing organization benefiting the many North Carolinians seeking disability support. The State of North Carolina is proud to recognize Russell for her outstanding government service.