

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

January 2010



Objective

To identify Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients who were potentially eligible for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits instead of SSI payments.

Background

Generally, individuals are not eligible for SSI if they fail to take all the appropriate steps to apply for all other benefits for which they may be eligible—including VA benefits.

VA administers a pension program that provides benefits to financially needy veterans who are aged or have disabilities unrelated to their military service. VA considers individuals disabled if they have been determined disabled by the Social Security Administration (SSA). Veterans must also meet eligibility requirements related to their military service to qualify for VA pension benefits.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-01-09-19031df>

Supplemental Security Income Recipients Eligible for Veterans Benefits (A-01-09-19031)

Our Findings

We found that some SSI recipients appeared potentially eligible for VA benefits instead of SSI payments. Based on our review, we estimate SSA paid about \$1.3 billion to approximately 22,000 SSI recipients who appeared to meet VA requirements for benefits. In addition, we estimate that SSA will continue to pay about \$126 million in SSI payments over the next 12 months to individuals who appear eligible for VA benefits instead of SSI payments.

For example, in one case, a disabled SSI recipient had military earnings during the Vietnam era. This recipient served in the Army from October 1968 to July 1970 for approximately 640 days—with at least 1 day during wartime—and received an honorable discharge from the military. Therefore, he appeared to meet VA's requirements for benefits and received about \$104,000 in SSI payments from January 1993 to June 2009. According to SSA's systems, there was no indication this individual had applied for VA benefits.

VA benefits are generally of greater monetary value than SSI payments—so it is usually more advantageous for the individuals to receive VA benefits. Specifically, in Fiscal Year 2007, the average monthly VA benefit was \$709, whereas the average monthly SSI payment was \$468. Therefore, if these individuals are in fact eligible for VA benefits, they could receive higher monthly benefit payments.

Our Recommendation

We recommended SSA continue its efforts to work with VA to ensure individuals who should be receiving VA benefits instead of SSI payments are, in fact, receiving VA benefits.

SSA agreed with the recommendation.