

Match of Washington Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether death information in Washington State Department of Health (WSDH) death data files was recorded in Social Security Administration (SSA) records.

Background

To identify and prevent payments after death, section 205(r) of the *Social Security Act* requires that SSA establish a program under which States can voluntarily contract with the Agency to provide death data to match against its records.

We obtained WSDH data files that contained approximately 1.8 million Social Security numberholders who died in Washington during Calendar Years 1968 through 2014.

We matched the data files against SSA payment records and identified beneficiaries in current payment status and representative payees whose personally identifiable information matched that of a deceased individual listed in the WSDH files. We also matched the data files against SSA's full file of death records to identify individuals who were not receiving payments (that is, non-beneficiaries) and had unrecorded deaths in SSA's Numident system.

Findings

We identified a relatively small number of instances in which death information in WSDH files did not appear in SSA records. As a result, SSA issued about \$978,000 in benefits after death to 18 individuals who died in Washington during Calendar Years 2000 through 2014. Our Office of Investigations is reviewing one additional case where it appeared a beneficiary received payments after death. If the investigation confirms the beneficiary is deceased, we estimate SSA issued about \$161,000 in payments after the beneficiary's death.

We also identified seven deceased representative payees who were issued \$260,880 in payments after their deaths. During our audit, SSA replaced, or was replacing, these representative payees. Finally, we identified 17,160 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to WSDH data but did not have a death information in SSA records.

Conclusion

While we found SSA issued payments after death for a small number of beneficiaries who died in Washington, the cases represent an opportunity for SSA to reduce improper payments and improve the completeness of its death information.

We provided SSA with WSDH death data and any necessary death certificates to update its records or take other appropriate action on these cases. SSA had completed, or was completing, action to address these cases. Therefore, we made no recommendation for corrective action.