

# Match of Treasury Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

### Objective

To determine the appropriateness of payments the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued to beneficiaries who were deceased according to Department of the Treasury (Treasury) data.

### Background

SSA administers the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs under Titles II and XVI of the *Social Security Act*, respectively. Under both programs, payments should terminate when a beneficiary dies.

We obtained data from Treasury's Department of Fiscal Services that identified death information it received while processing *non-SSA* Federal benefit payments from January 2, 2015 through May 4, 2017. We matched the data against SSA payment records and identified beneficiaries in current payment status whose personally identifiable information matched that of individuals for whom dates of death were listed in the Treasury data.

### Findings

At the time of our review, SSA was issuing payments to 621 beneficiaries whose personally identifiable information matched that of individuals for whom dates of death were listed in Treasury data files. Our audit results indicated that at least 42 percent of those beneficiaries were alive, and death information in Treasury's records was erroneous. However, our audit results also indicated that at least 24 percent of those beneficiaries were deceased.

Each day, Treasury sends SSA data that contain information on SSA payments returned to Treasury because the beneficiary has died. However, SSA does not receive information on (1) *non-SSA* Federal benefit payments returned to Treasury because the beneficiary had died or (2) death reclamations Treasury processed for other Federal benefit-paying agencies. Because SSA and Treasury did not share this death information, occasionally, SSA issued benefit payments to individuals that other Federal agencies had determined were deceased.

We estimate SSA issued approximately \$2.3 million in improper payments to 137 deceased beneficiaries. Identification and correction of these discrepancies prevented or will prevent approximately \$1.1 million in additional improper payments over the next 12 months. We note this is a small number of errors relative to more than 200,000 numberholders in the Treasury data files.

### Recommendations

We recommend SSA verify the vital status of the beneficiaries and determine the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of obtaining death reports from Treasury when Treasury receives death information for other Federal benefit-paying agencies' beneficiaries.

SSA agreed with the recommendations.