

Match of Ohio Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

A-06-18-50768



November 2020

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objectives

To (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made payments to beneficiaries and representative payees who were deceased according to Ohio Department of Health vital records and (2) identify non-beneficiaries in the State files whose death information did not appear in Agency records.

Background

To identify and prevent payments after death, SSA established a program under which States can voluntarily contract to provide SSA with death data to match against SSA's records. Through the Electronic Death Registration (EDR) system, States electronically submit death reports to SSA. If the decedent's data match SSA records, SSA posts the State death information to its Numident file and terminates payments to deceased beneficiaries. In addition to EDR, SSA receives death information from other sources, such as family members and funeral directors.

We obtained data files that provided the personally identifiable information of approximately 4.6 million Social Security numberholders the Ohio Department of Health recorded as deceased from January 1970 through December 2017. We matched the data against SSA records.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued \$28.6 million in payments after death to 711 beneficiaries and 3 representative payees who died in Ohio from January 1970 through December 2017. We estimate that identifying and correcting these discrepancies prevented, or will prevent, approximately \$7.9 million in additional payments after death over a 12-month period.

We also identified 51,807 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Ohio Department of Health vital records but whose death information was not in SSA's Numident. Resolving these discrepancies will improve the accuracy and completeness of death information the Agency shares with other Federal benefit-paying agencies.

We did not determine why the deaths were not in SSA's Numident or whether the State reported the deaths to SSA. SSA rejects EDR death reports that do not pass its formatting and identification test so it does not post erroneous death data to its records.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of November 13, 2020, SSA had replaced all 3 deceased representative payees, terminated payments to 376 deceased beneficiaries, and initiated recovery of \$20.2 million in improper payments.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Take action to record deaths on the Numident, terminate payments, and initiate collection of overpayments, as appropriate, for the remaining beneficiaries we identified.
2. Add death information to the Numident, as appropriate, for the 51,807 non-beneficiaries with dates of death we identified using Ohio records.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.