

Match of Colorado Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objectives

To (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made payments to beneficiaries and/or representative payees who were deceased according to Colorado 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 with SSA to provide it death data to match against its records. Through Electronic Death Registration (EDR), 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 2.2 million individuals the State of Colorado recorded as deceased from January 1900 through September 2019. We matched the data against SSA payment records and the Numident file.

Findings

SSA issued approximately \$8.6 million in payments after death to 194 beneficiaries who died in Colorado from January 1900 through September 2019. Identifying and correcting these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$2.5 million in additional payments after death over a 12-month period. We did not identify any deceased representative payees who were receiving SSA payments.

We identified 8,773 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Colorado 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. However, SSA rejects EDR death reports that do not pass its formatting and identification tests to prevent posting erroneous death data to its records.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of March 12, 2021, SSA had terminated payments to 179 deceased beneficiaries and initiated recovery of approximately \$7.3 million in improper payments.

Recommendations

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 8,773 non-beneficiaries with dates of death we identified using Colorado records.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.