

Match of Louisiana Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

A-06-18-50907



December 2020

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 Louisiana 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 1.6 million Social Security numberholders the Louisiana Department of Health recorded as deceased from January 1979 through December 2019. We matched the data against SSA records.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued \$15.8 million in payments after death to at least 288 beneficiaries who died in Louisiana from January 1979 through December 2019. We estimate identifying and correcting these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$3.1 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 also identified 23,695 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Louisiana 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. 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 December 18, 2020, SSA had terminated payments to 257 deceased beneficiaries and initiated recovery of \$11 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 23,695 non-beneficiaries with dates of death we identified using Louisiana records.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.