

Manually Posted Supplemental Security Income Overpayments to Surviving Spouses A-13-14-14058



April 2016

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) had manually transferred Supplemental Security Income (SSI) overpayments to the surviving individual of an eligible couple.

Background

SSI is a means-tested program designed to provide a monthly payment to aged, blind, or disabled individuals who have limited income and resources. SSA assesses individuals' income, resources, and living arrangements to determine eligibility and payment amounts. SSA relies on recipient self-disclosure of all financial resources, as well as information provided by other Federal and State agencies, to ensure payment accuracy.

Improper payments can occur if recipients or "deemors" (parent or spouse) fail to timely report changes in any eligibility factors. An SSI overpayment occurs when a deceased member of an eligible couple has an overpayment that may qualify for transfer to the surviving spouse. The Agency's decision to transfer the overpayment to the surviving spouse and notify him/her of liability for repayment of a deceased individual's overpayment requires development by SSA staff if the surviving spouse was a member of the couple during the overpayment period.

Findings

Agency staff did not always transfer SSI overpayments to the surviving individual of an eligible couple. We identified 1,231 deceased SSI recipients who had approximately \$3 million in overpayments that SSA had not transferred to the surviving spouse. Based on the percentage of records the Agency reviewed and reported was eligible, we estimate that approximately 948 deceased recipients' overpayments may have been eligible for transfer to the surviving spouses for collection. Because of the large finding rate we identified in our review, we believe the Agency should review for potential transfer to the surviving spouses all outstanding overpayments for 1,231 deceased SSI recipients.

Recommendations

Based on the results of our review, we recommend SSA:

1. Review the terminated SSI recipients' outstanding overpayments we identified and transfer all applicable overpayments to the surviving spouses for collection.
2. Review and document its waiver and uncollectible decisions for overpayments of the four deceased recipients we identified, determine whether all overpayments on their records are eligible for transfer to the surviving spouses' records, and take appropriate collection action for eligible overpayments.
3. Consider establishing an alert to notify SSA staff when an overpayment exists on a deceased eligible spouse's SSI record or implement a process to periodically identify overpayments eligible for transfer to the surviving spouse's records.

Generally, SSA agreed with our recommendations.