

Office of Personnel Management Deaths Not in the Social Security Administration's Systems

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August 2016

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether deceased individuals in the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) annuitant file were recorded in the Social Security Administration's (SSA) systems.

Background

In Fiscal Year 2015, SSA paid about \$932 billion under the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and Supplemental Security Income programs to nearly 65 million beneficiaries and recipients. Under these programs, payment to a beneficiary or recipient terminates when the individual dies.

SSA receives death reports from other Federal agencies—but not OPM.

For our review, we obtained from OPM a copy of its annuitant file, which had 2.7 million records with dates of death through December 2013.

Findings

OPM's annuitant file contained deaths that were not recorded in SSA's systems. SSA paid \$1.7 million in OASDI benefits to 35 deceased beneficiaries. The average payment after death was \$49,156 for an average of 84 months.

Additionally, we estimate SSA would have continued paying these beneficiaries approximately \$258,000 over the next year had the deaths not been identified.

Also, we identified six additional individuals whose deaths were on OPM's file and whose payments SSA had terminated, but whom the Agency paid after their deaths. Had SSA obtained death data regularly from OPM, the Agency could have identified these deaths earlier and prevented \$56,695 in OASDI benefits being paid after death for these six individuals.

Although we found SSA improperly paid a small number of beneficiaries—as compared to the total number of individuals receiving benefits—the cases we found represented an opportunity for SSA to reduce payments after death and improve the completeness of its Death Master File.

On July 1, 2016, SSA informed us it was negotiating with OPM to obtain monthly death reports.

Recommendation

We recommend SSA enter into an agreement with OPM to periodically obtain its death data—with dates of death reported to OPM in calendar year 2014 forward.

SSA agreed with the recommendation. SSA plans to have a formal data exchange agreement in place with OPM in FY 2017 at no cost to the Agency.