

Redeterminations Social Security Administration Employees Closed Without Assessing Resources

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether Social Security Administration (SSA) staff used updated values of all resources when they completed redeterminations to determine whether recipients remained eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments.

Background

Because SSI is a needs-based program, SSA periodically completes redeterminations, which are reviews of recipients' and their deemors' non-medical eligibility factors to determine whether recipients are still eligible for, and receiving, the correct SSI payments. Deemors are individuals, such as an ineligible spouse or parent, whose income and resources SSA considers when it determines recipients' SSI eligibility and payment amounts.

SSA staff generally uses the Modernized Supplemental Security Income Claims System (MSSICS) to complete redeterminations. MSSICS includes questions that guide staff to ask recipients about all the resources they and their deemors possess. MSSICS displays a detailed resource screen for each type of resource identified. Staff uses the screen to document the resource values.

We reviewed a random sample of 200 recipients who had redeterminations completed during Fiscal Years 2015 through 2018.

Findings

SSA staff did not update the value of 1 or more resources in MSSICS when they completed redeterminations for 131 of the 200 recipients we reviewed. In total, staff did not update 207 resource values. The values were last updated during a previous redetermination or contact or when the recipients initially applied for SSI. Without the updated values, we could not determine whether staff considered the values when they determined whether the recipients' resources were over the tolerance amount or resource limit.

Of the 207 resources staff did not update, 187 were financial accounts. We acquired the financial account records, and, when we added the actual account values to the recipients' other resources in MSSICS, we determined 16 recipients' resources were over the tolerance amount, and 8 recipients were over the SSI resource limit. The eight recipients received \$7,743 in SSI payments for which they were ineligible. Projecting these results to the population, 65,980 recipients were over the SSI resource limit and were improperly paid approximately \$64 million.

Finally, SSA did not list all the recipients' financial accounts as resources in MSSICS. Thirty-one recipients had financial accounts in the Supplemental Security Record as the accounts into which their SSI payments were direct deposited. These accounts were not listed as resources in MSSICS. For the eight recipients we determined were over the resource limit, two were over the limit based on financial accounts that were listed in SSA's Supplemental Security Record but not in MSSICS.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA (1) determine the eligibility of the eight SSI recipients we determined were over the resource limit because of their financial account balances; (2) update its policy to require staff to document in MSSICS the values of all identified resources for the current redetermination period to ensure a complete record of the resource values staff used to make determinations on recipients' SSI eligibility; and (3) remind staff to develop recipient-owned accounts listed on the Supplemental Security Record when completing redeterminations. SSA disagreed with our second recommendation, while agreeing with our first and third recommendations.