

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

June 2011



Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) had taken appropriate actions for Title II beneficiaries over age 70 whose benefits were suspended for address, whereabouts unknown, or miscellaneous reasons.

Background

SSA may suspend benefits when it receives a third-party report that a beneficiary is missing, undeliverable checks are returned, or beneficiaries living outside the United States do not return the foreign enforcement questionnaire (FEQ). When a beneficiary's whereabouts are unknown and benefits have been suspended for at least 7 years, SSA will assume the reason the beneficiary failed to request payment is death. SSA uses this presumption of death to terminate benefits and prevent benefits from remaining in suspense indefinitely.

To view the full report, visit
http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO_BEPDF/A-09-09-29117.pdf

Aged Beneficiaries Whose Benefits Have Been Suspended for Address or Whereabouts Unknown (A-09-09-29117)

Our Findings

SSA had not taken appropriate actions for Title II beneficiaries over age 70 whose benefits were suspended for address, whereabouts unknown, or miscellaneous reasons. We estimate that

- 29,196 beneficiaries whose whereabouts were unknown for longer than 7 years had not been terminated based on a presumption of death;
- 5,981 beneficiaries had been suspended between 2 and 7 years because their whereabouts were unknown; and
- 2,964 foreign beneficiaries were suspended because they did not return the FEQ, and there was no evidence that SSA conducted the required follow-up actions to determine their whereabouts or whether they were deceased.

Our Recommendations

We recommended that SSA:

1. Identify and terminate, in accordance with SSA's presumption of death policy, the entitlement of the estimated 29,196 beneficiaries whose whereabouts were unknown and have been in suspended pay status for 7 or more years.
2. Ensure suspended beneficiaries whose whereabouts were unknown for 2 years or more have their identity and continuing eligibility for benefits validated before reinstating benefits.
3. Take appropriate action (including termination of benefits) for the estimated 2,964 suspended beneficiaries living outside the United States who did not return the FEQ.
4. Implement controls to identify beneficiaries in suspense for 7 or more years and ensure these beneficiaries are terminated for presumption of death in a timely manner.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.