

Match of Massachusetts Death Information Against Social Security Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether individuals listed as deceased by the Massachusetts Registry of Vital Records and Statistics (MRVRS) were listed in Social Security Administration (SSA) records as receiving Social Security benefit payments or acting as representative payees.

Background

To identify and prevent payments after death, section 205(r) of the *Social Security Act* requires that SSA establish a program under which States can voluntarily contract with the Agency to provide death data to match against its records.

To ensure SSA has all available death information, we obtained from the MRVRS a data file of more than 2 million individuals who died in the State from January 1980 through August 2016.

We validated the Social Security numbers, names, or dates of birth on about 1.8 million records. We matched these validated records to SSA's records to identify deceased individuals who were receiving SSA benefit payments; listed as representative payees; and non-beneficiaries with unrecorded deaths on SSA's records.

Findings

MRVRS death information was not always on SSA's records. As a result, SSA issued approximately \$3.6 million in payments after death to 41 individuals who died from 1980 through 2014. In addition, we identified 8 deceased individuals' representative payees who were issued \$278,540 in payments after death and 13,891 non-beneficiaries who were likely deceased with no death information on SSA's records.

Conclusion

While we found SSA issued payments after death for a small number of beneficiaries who died in Massachusetts, the cases we identified represent an opportunity for SSA to reduce payments after death and improve the completeness of its death information.

During our review, we provided SSA with MRVRS death data and any necessary death certificates to update its records or take other appropriate action on these cases. Before we issued this report, SSA suspended or terminated benefits, replaced deceased representative payees, and added death information to its records for some of the unrecorded deaths we brought to its attention. In addition, the Agency or Office of Investigations continued reviewing the other outstanding death cases. Therefore, we made no recommendations for further corrective action.