

Match of Alabama, Georgia, and Illinois Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objectives

To (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made payments to beneficiaries and/or representative payees who were deceased according to Alabama, Georgia, or Illinois records and (2) identify non-beneficiaries in the States' files whose death information did not appear in Agency records.

Background

To identify and prevent payments after death, SSA established a program under which States can voluntarily contract with SSA to provide it death data to match against its records.

Through Electronic Death Registration (EDR), States electronically submit death reports to SSA. If the decedent's data match SSA records, SSA posts the State death information to its Numident file and terminates payments to deceased beneficiaries. In addition to EDR, SSA receives death information from other sources, such as family members and funeral directors.

We obtained data files that provided the personally identifiable information of approximately 7 million individuals Alabama, Georgia, or Illinois recorded as deceased between January 1978 and December 2018. We matched the data against SSA payment records and the Numident.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued approximately \$79 million in payments after death to 1,127 beneficiaries and 4 representative payees who died in Alabama, Georgia, or Illinois between January 1978 and December 2018. Identifying and correcting these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$14 million in additional improper payments after death over a 12-month period.

We also identified 53,486 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Alabama, Georgia, or Illinois records but whose death information was not in SSA's Numident. Resolving these discrepancies will improve the accuracy and completeness of death information the Agency shares with other Federal benefit-paying agencies.

We did not determine why the deaths we identified were not in SSA's Numident or whether Alabama, Georgia, or Illinois reported those deaths to SSA. However, SSA rejects EDR reports that do not pass its formatting and identification tests to prevent posting erroneous death data to its records.

The Numident contained death information for three of the four representative payees; however, at the time of our review, SSA had not replaced any of the four we identified.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of April 2021, SSA had terminated payments to 832 deceased beneficiaries and 4 deceased representative payees. SSA had also initiated recovery of approximately \$35 million in improper payments.

Recommendations

We made six recommendations for SSA to take appropriate action on the cases identified by our audit. SSA agreed with our recommendations.