

Match of Oklahoma 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 representative payees who were deceased according to Oklahoma Department of Health vital records and (2) identify non-beneficiaries in the State 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 to provide SSA with death data to match against SSA's records. SSA and the States developed the Electronic Death Registration (EDR) process to improve the accuracy and timeliness of death information.

Through EDR, States electronically submit death records to SSA, and SSA completes online, real-time verification of the Social Security number. If the numberholder's data match SSA records, SSA posts the State death information to its Numident file and terminates payments to deceased beneficiaries.

We obtained data files that provided the personally identifiable information of approximately 1.4 million Social Security numberholders the Oklahoma Department of Health recorded as deceased from January 1970 through December 2017. We matched the data against SSA records.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued \$11.2 million in payments after death to 310 beneficiaries and 2 representative payees who died in Oklahoma from January 1970 through December 2017. We estimate that identifying and correcting these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$3.5 million in additional payments after death over a 12-month period.

We also identified 16,238 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Oklahoma Department of Health vital 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 were not in SSA's Numident or whether the State reported the deaths to SSA. However, SSA rejects EDR death reports that do not pass its formatting and identification tests so it does not post erroneous death data to its records. We have a separate, ongoing review that is assessing the effectiveness of the EDR process.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of May 15, 2020, SSA had terminated benefits to 244 beneficiaries and 2 representative payees and initiated recovery of \$10.1 million in improper payments.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Take action on the remaining deceased beneficiaries we identified.
2. Take action on the 16,238 deceased non-beneficiaries we identified to add their deaths to the Numident, as appropriate.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.