

Match of Delaware Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

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November 2019

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 Delaware's Office of Vital Statistics and (2) identify non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to the State file but whose death information did not appear in SSA's records.

Background

To identify and prevent payments after death, SSA established a program under which States can voluntarily contract with SSA to provide it with death data to match against its 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 an 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 the personally identifiable information of approximately 200,000 Social Security numberholders the Delaware Office of Vital Statistics recorded as deceased between January 1992 and December 2017. We matched the data against SSA payment records and the Numident.

Findings

SSA issued approximately \$2 million in payments after death to 31 beneficiaries and 2 representative payees whom the State of Delaware recorded as deceased from January 1992 through December 2017. Identifying and correcting these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$440,000 in additional improper payments after death over a 12-month period. We also identified 2,851 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to the Delaware Office of Vital Statistics but whose death information was not in SSA's Numident.

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 to prevent posting erroneous death data to its records. We have a separate ongoing review that will assess the effectiveness of the EDR process.

The Numident contained death information for the two representative payees; however, SSA had not replaced the representative payees at the time of our data match. As of October 2019, SSA had taken action to replace one of the two representative payees we identified.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of October 2019, SSA had terminated benefits to 11 of the 31 deceased beneficiaries and 1 of 2 representative payees. It also initiated recovery of \$550,000 in improper payments.

Recommendations

1. Take action on the remaining 20 deceased beneficiaries and 1 deceased representative payee we identified.
2. Take action on the 2,851 deceased non-beneficiaries we identified to add their deaths to the Numident, as appropriate.

SSA agreed with the recommendations.