

Using Medicare Data to Identify Disabled Individuals Who Are Deceased

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) could use Medicare non-use data to identify disabled beneficiaries who are receiving benefits but are deceased.

Background

Title II of the *Social Security Act* allows individuals to receive Disability Insurance (DI) benefits if they are fully insured, have not reached retirement age, and are determined to be disabled. The *Social Security Act* considers an adult disabled if they cannot engage in any substantial gainful activity because of a medically determinable physical or mental impairment that can be expected to result in death or has lasted, or can be expected to last, for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.

Medicare is a Federal health insurance program for individuals who are receiving Title II retirement benefits or who have been receiving disability benefits. Generally, after 24 months of DI entitlement, individuals are entitled to hospital insurance (Medicare Part A) and can elect supplemental medical insurance (Medicare Part B).

Findings

Based on the results of our review, we believe SSA should use Medicare non-use data to identify disabled beneficiaries who are receiving benefits but are deceased. Because disabled beneficiaries often need medical care, we believe some beneficiaries for whom we could not find evidence of routine medical care may be deceased. For example, SSA either terminated or suspended the benefits of 5 (10 percent) of our 50 sample beneficiaries.

Recommendations

We recommend that SSA:

1. Work with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to obtain an agreement to identify disabled beneficiaries who are not using Medicare and use this information to determine whether these beneficiaries are alive. SSA should focus on disabilities that generally require routine medical care to identify high-risk beneficiaries.
2. Work the remaining cases in our universe (who are in current payment status) that SSA identifies as high-risk to determine whether these beneficiaries are alive.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.