

Payments to Individuals Listed as Deceased in Department of Veterans Affairs' Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine the appropriateness of payments the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued to individuals listed as deceased in Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) records.

Background

SSA administers the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs under Titles II and XVI of the *Social Security Act*, respectively.

Each month, the VA furnishes SSA with automated death records. Before SSA terminates benefit payments or records death information on the Numident, SSA employees must independently verify the VA death information.

In April 2016, we obtained data from VA identifying approximately 17 million deceased individuals. We matched the VA data against SSA's payment records to identify potentially deceased beneficiaries in current payment status.

Findings

SSA issued payments to 3,925 beneficiaries who had dates of death in VA's records. Our audit results indicated that at least 11 percent of these beneficiaries were alive, and death information in VA's records was erroneous. However, our audit results also indicated that at least 19 percent of these beneficiaries were deceased, and death information in VA's records was accurate.

SSA reviewed selected instances and stated that VA had not included most of the individuals' death information in monthly death data transmitted to SSA. Based on our sample results, we estimate SSA issued about \$37.7 million to 746 individuals after they died and will issue approximately \$7.3 million more over the next 12 months if these discrepancies are not corrected.

Recommendations

We provided SSA with a data file of the 3,925 beneficiaries we identified and recommend that the Agency:

1. Review the data file and take additional action, as appropriate, to determine the status of beneficiaries it determines may be deceased, terminate their payments where appropriate, and refer potential instances of suspected fraud to the Office of Investigations.
2. Work with VA to ensure subsequent data exchanges include comprehensive death information.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.