

The Social Security Administration's Determinations of Supplemental Security Income Recipients' Real Properties

022328



September 2023

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine the accuracy of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) eligibility and payment determinations for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicants and/or recipients who own real property.

Background

The SSI program provides monthly payments to people who have limited income and resources and are aged, blind, or disabled. For SSI purposes, resources are items individuals own that can be converted to cash. To be eligible for SSI, applicants and recipients may not have countable resources over \$2,000, and couples may not have countable resources over \$3,000.

Homes that SSI applicants and recipients own and reside in do not count toward SSI resource limits. The current market values of any properties other than their owned primary residences, referred to as non-home real properties (NHRP), are generally considered countable resources for SSI eligibility purposes.

In 2017, SSA introduced an electronic search application that employees are required to use in most cases to identify applicants' and recipients' real-property information. We reviewed 400 applicants/recipients who had real properties identified through the search application. Of these, properties were a determining factor for SSI eligibility and payments in 122 cases.

Results

SSA employees did not accurately determine property ownership and/or values for 17 (14 percent) of 122 SSI applicants/recipients. As a result, applicants were possibly denied SSI when they should not have been, and recipients received SSI payments for which they were not eligible. Of the 17 applicants/recipients:

- 4 applicants may have been incorrectly denied SSI. SSA needs to further develop these cases to verify the applicants' SSI eligibility, and
- 13 recipients received over \$180,000 in SSI payments for which they were not eligible.

We determined employees did not correctly determine the applicants'/recipients' countable resources, including reviewing for prior ownership. In addition, SSA employees did not add required documentation in SSA's records to support their real-property determinations for these 17, and 43 other, cases.

We project 1,204 applicants may have been improperly denied SSI eligibility, and 35,885 recipients were improperly paid because SSA employees made inaccurate real-property determinations.

Finally, the electronic search application did not match some properties to SSI applicants/recipients because of name variations in the property database and SSA records. As a result, SSA employees could not evaluate possible NHRPs when they determined applicants'/recipients' countable resource values.

Recommendations

We made six recommendations, including that SSA add system controls to ensure employees review for NHRPs that may have been owned or sold but still affect SSI eligibility and payment decisions; add system controls to ensure employees add required documentation that supports real property determinations; and review system processing of names to reduce inaccurate name mismatches. SSA agreed with five of our recommendations and disagreed with one.