

# Match of California Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

## A-06-18-50706



September 2021

Office of Audit Report Summary

### Objective

To (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made payments to beneficiaries and/or representative payees who were deceased according to California Department of Public Health 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 with SSA to provide it death data to match against its records. Through the Electronic Death Registration (EDR) system, States electronically submit death reports to SSA. If the decedent's data match SSA records, SSA posts the State death information to its Numident file and terminates payments to deceased beneficiaries. SSA receives death information from other sources, such as family members and funeral directors.

We obtained data files that provided the personally identifiable information of 16.1 million individuals the California Department of Public Health recorded as deceased from January 1905 through December 2017. We matched the data against SSA records.

### Findings

We identified 386 beneficiaries whose personally identifiable information matched that of a deceased individual in the California death data files. SSA terminated or suspended payments to 245 of these beneficiaries but issued approximately \$21.3 million in payments after these beneficiaries' deaths. Identification and termination or suspension of these payments prevented an additional \$3.3 million in improper payments over 12 months. SSA also determined that 89 beneficiaries were alive at the time of our audit.

SSA is reviewing payments to 52 additional beneficiaries who appear to be deceased. Based on other deceased beneficiary case referrals, we estimate 38 of the 52 beneficiaries are deceased, SSA has issued \$8.3 million in payments after their deaths, and identification and termination of these payments will prevent approximately \$600,000 in additional improper payments over 12 months. We did not identify any deceased representative payees receiving SSA payments.

We also identified 438,860 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to California Department of Public Health records but whose death information was not in SSA's Numident. In September 2020, we provided these records to SSA. 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 death information was not in SSA's Numident or whether the State reported the deaths to SSA. SSA rejects EDR death reports that do not pass its formatting and identification tests, so it does not post erroneous data to its records.

### Recommendations

We made four recommendations for corrective action. SSA agreed with our recommendations.