

Match of Utah Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

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September 2022

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made payments to beneficiaries who were deceased according to Utah 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 Electronic Death Registration (EDR), 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. In addition to EDR, 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 355,923 individuals the State of Utah recorded as deceased from May 1983 through December 2019. We matched the data against SSA enumeration and payment records.

Findings

We identified 44 beneficiaries whose personally identifiable information matched that of a deceased individual in the Utah death data files. SSA determined four beneficiaries were alive. SSA verified that 40 beneficiaries were deceased, terminated their benefits, and determined it issued approximately \$2.3 million in payments after their deaths. SSA's identification and termination of these payments prevented an additional \$533,000 in improper payments over 12 months.

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 to avoid posting erroneous data to its records.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

In September and October 2021, we referred to SSA the 44 cases where beneficiaries' personally identifiable information matched that of a deceased individual in the Utah death data files. SSA completed work on these cases in June 2022; therefore, we made no recommendations for corrective action.