

Numident Death Alerts

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September 2022

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) effectively managed the Numident death-alert process.

Background

To identify and prevent payments after death, the *Social Security Act* requires that SSA establish a program under which states can voluntarily contract to provide SSA with death data to match against SSA's records. Accordingly, SSA and the states developed the Electronic Death Registration (EDR) process to improve the accuracy and timeliness of death information.

Through EDR, states electronically submit death reports to SSA, and SSA verifies the Social Security number online and in real-time. If the decedent's data match SSA records, SSA automatically posts the state death information to the Numident, an SSA database that stores personally identifiable information for all Social Security numberholders and should terminate payments to deceased beneficiaries.

When death data are present on the Numident, but there are no corresponding death data on a beneficiary's payment record, SSA's Death Alerts Tracking System produces a Numident death alert and routes the alert to the beneficiary's servicing field office for review.

Findings

SSA did not always effectively manage the Numident death alert process. SSA continued issuing payments to 1,300 beneficiaries for months or years after it received and recorded their death information on the Numident. This included 1,224 cases with Numident death alerts generated in June 2021 or earlier that remained pending in September 2021 and 76 cases with no Numident death alert pending. We estimate SSA issued \$14 million in payments after these beneficiaries' deaths. Correcting these errors will prevent an estimated \$6 million in additional improper payments over 12 months.

Recommendations

We made seven recommendations for corrective action including that SSA resolve all pending Numident death alerts generated from June 2013 through August 2022, terminate benefits, and recover improper payments, as appropriate. We also recommended that SSA terminate payment records and recover improper payments issued after death for the cases that did not generate alerts.

Agency Comments

SSA agreed with four recommendations and disagreed with three.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of August 27, 2022, SSA had resolved 941 of the 1,224 pending alerts. During the resolution process, SSA removed death information from 68 beneficiaries' Numident records, indicating SSA determined the beneficiaries were alive. We excluded the 68 cases from the estimated improper payments/payments after death presented in the report. We reviewed and summarized the payment status of the beneficiaries associated with the remaining 1,156 alerts and 76 beneficiaries whose Numident records contained a date of death in May 2021 or earlier but had no Numident death alert pending.