

Match of Maine and Rhode Island Death Data Against Social Security Administration Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objectives

To (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made payments to beneficiaries and/or representative payees who were deceased according to Maine or Rhode Island records and (2) identify non-beneficiaries in the State files whose death information did not appear in the Agency's 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. SSA receives death information from a variety of sources; such as family members, funeral homes, and the Electronic Death Registration (EDR) process.

We obtained Maine and Rhode Island data files that provided the personally identifiable information of 812,173 Social Security numberholders who died in the States during Calendar Years 1982 through 2018. We matched the data against SSA payment records and the Numident. SSA's Numident file contains the personally identifiable information of all Social Security numberholders.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued approximately \$1.5 million in payments after death to 33 beneficiaries who died in Maine or Rhode Island in Calendar Years 1982 through 2018. Of the \$1.5 million, SSA posted \$1.3 million in overpayments for 31 individuals; and we estimate SSA will post \$222,320 in overpayments for the 2 individuals under review. We estimate SSA prevented approximately \$374,300 in payments after death over the next 12 months for the 31 individuals whose records it updated with a date of death.

We also identified 3,826 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Maine or Rhode Island vital records but whose death information was not in SSA's Numident.

We did not determine why this death information did not appear in SSA records. We provided all the cases we identified to SSA to review and post death information, as appropriate, to payment records and the Numident. By doing so, SSA will improve the accuracy and completeness of its death information that is shared with other Federal benefit-paying agencies.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Take action, as appropriate, on the two beneficiaries who have dates of death per Rhode Island records but are in current pay.
2. Take action, as appropriate, on the 3,826 non-beneficiaries with dates of death per Maine or Rhode Island and add their deaths to the Numident.

SSA agreed with the recommendations.