

Match of New Hampshire and Vermont Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records A-01-19-50865



June 2020

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 New Hampshire or Vermont 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 Electronic Death Registration (EDR), States electronically submit death records 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 475,853 individuals the States of New Hampshire and Vermont recorded as deceased between January 1980 and December 2018. We matched the data against SSA payment records and the Numident file.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued approximately \$1.7 million in payments after death to 31 beneficiaries who died in New Hampshire or Vermont between January 1980 and December 2018. We also identified one representative payee who died in New Hampshire; however, SSA had not replaced the representative payee and therefore issued approximately \$19,000 in payments after death. Finally, we identified 2,064 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to New Hampshire or Vermont records but whose death information did not appear in SSA records.

Posting death information to SSA's records will prevent approximately \$304,000 in additional improper payments after death over a 12-month period; reduce SSA's exposure to future improper payments; and improve the accuracy and completeness of death information the Agency shares with other Federal benefit-paying agencies.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of June 2020, SSA had terminated benefits to 24 of the 31 deceased beneficiaries and posted \$1.2 million in overpayments. Of the \$1.2 million in overpayments, SSA recovered \$329,263 and determined \$810 was uncollectible. SSA is pursuing recovery of outstanding overpayments. SSA or our Office of Investigations continue reviewing the remaining seven cases. SSA suspended payments to the deceased representative payee. Finally, SSA had recorded 7 of 2,064 non-beneficiary deaths on the Numident records.

Recommendations

We made three recommendations for SSA to take appropriate action on the cases identified by our audit. SSA agreed with the recommendations.