

Match of Texas Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine the appropriateness of payments the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued to beneficiaries and representative payees who were deceased according to Texas Department of State Health Services vital records. We also identified non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Texas vital records but whose death information did not appear in SSA records.

Background

To identify and prevent payments after death, SSA established a program under which States can voluntarily contract with the Agency to provide death data to match against its records.

We obtained Texas Department of State Health Services data that provided the personally identifiable information of approximately 5.5 million Social Security numberholders who died in Texas from January 1976 to September 2017.

We matched the data against SSA payment records and identified current beneficiaries and representative payees whose personally identifiable information matched that of a deceased individual in the death data. We also identified non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Texas vital records but whose death information did not appear in SSA records.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued about \$25 million in payments after death to approximately 336 beneficiaries and 18 representative payees who died in Texas during Calendar Year 2016 or earlier. We provided SSA with Texas death data and death certificates, and SSA had completed, or was completing, actions to address these cases. Identification and correction of these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$4 million in additional improper payments over the next 12 months.

We also identified 42,810 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Texas vital records but whose death information did not appear in SSA records. We provided SSA with Texas death data for these non-beneficiaries. Resolving these discrepancies will reduce SSA's exposure to future improper payments and improve the accuracy and completeness of the death information it shares with other Federal benefit-paying agencies.

Conclusion

These cases represented an opportunity for SSA to reduce improper payments and improve the completeness of its death information. SSA had completed, or was completing, action to address the improper payment cases. SSA stated that, because the non-beneficiary cases did not involve improper payments, any cleanup of these cases was a low priority and resource-dependent. SSA stated the earliest it could consider posting death information for these cases was the last quarter of Fiscal Year 2019.

Since SSA was already taking action on the issues we identified, we made no recommendations for corrective action and SSA had no comments on the report.