

Match of Puerto Rico Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

A-08-14-14013



August 2019

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objectives

To (1) determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) made payments to beneficiaries and representative payees who were deceased according to Puerto Rico Department of Health vital records and (2) identify non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Puerto Rico 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 (and U.S. territories) can voluntarily contract with SSA to provide it with death data to match against SSA's records. SSA and the States developed the Electronic Death Registration (EDR) process to improve the accuracy and timeliness of death information. States electronically submit death reports to SSA, and, if the numberholder data match SSA records, SSA systems automatically post the State death information and terminate payments to deceased beneficiaries. Puerto Rico does not have EDR in place.

Puerto Rico Department of Health provided us a vital records data file of the personally identifiable information of approximately 568,000 numberholders who died in Puerto Rico from January 1992 through December 2016. We matched the data against SSA payment records and Numident.

Findings

SSA issued approximately \$11.6 million in payments after death to 149 beneficiaries and 4 representative payees who died in Puerto Rico from January 1992 through December 2016. Identifying and correcting these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$1.4 million in additional improper payments after death over the next 12 months. We also identified 33,258 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Puerto Rico Department of Health vital records but whose death information was not in SSA's Numident.

We could not determine why the deaths were not in SSA's Numident or whether Puerto Rico reported the deaths to SSA. Implementing EDR should help ensure Puerto Rico deaths are properly and timely reported to SSA.

The Numident contained death information for two of the four representative payees; however, SSA had not replaced the representative payees. In several prior audits, we found SSA did not always replace representative payees after it posted death information to their Numident records.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Take action on the 149 deceased beneficiaries we identified.
2. Take action on the four deceased representative payees we identified.
3. Take action on the 33,258 deceased non-beneficiaries we identified to add their deaths to the Numident, as appropriate.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.