

Match of Florida Death Information 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 representative payees who were deceased according to Florida Department of Health vital records and (2) identify non-beneficiaries in the State file whose death information did not appear in SSA'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 with death data to match against its records. 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 completes an online, real-time verification of the Social Security number. If the numberholder data match SSA records, SSA systems automatically post the State death information and terminate payments to deceased beneficiaries.

We obtained a Florida Department of Health vital records data file of the personally identifiable information of approximately 4.1 million numberholders who died in Florida from January 1990 through December 2014. We matched the data against SSA payment records and Numident.

Findings

We estimate SSA issued approximately \$36 million in payments after death to at least 474 of the 501 beneficiaries and 3 representative payees who died in Florida from January 1990 through December 2014. We estimate that identifying and correcting these discrepancies will prevent approximately \$6 million in additional improper payments after death over the next 12 months. We also identified 17,349 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to Florida 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 the State ever reported the deaths to SSA. According to the Florida Department of Health, the State reported approximately 98 percent of its deaths to SSA through the EDR process in 2014. However, SSA rejects EDR death reports it cannot verify to prevent posting erroneous death data to its records. To help determine the causes of unposted death information, we are planning a review that will assess the effectiveness of the EDR process.

The Numident contained death information for two of the three representative payees; however, SSA had not replaced the representative payees. In several prior audits, we found that 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 501 deceased beneficiaries we identified.
2. Take action on the 17,349 deceased non-beneficiaries we identified to add their deaths to the Numident, as appropriate.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.