

# Match of Virginia Death Information Against the Social Security Administration Records

## A-15-18-50680



October 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 Virginia's Department of Health, Division of Vital Records, and (2) identify non-beneficiaries in the Commonwealth's 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. Virginia began reporting deaths to SSA through the EDR process on November 3, 2014. In addition to EDR, SSA receives death information from other sources, such as family members and funeral directors.

We obtained the personally identifiable information of approximately 1.85 million numberholders the Virginia Department of Health recorded as deceased between January 1979 and October 2014. We matched the data against SSA's payment records and Numident file.

### Findings

We estimate SSA issued approximately \$5.4 million in payments after death to 42 beneficiaries and 6 representative payees whom the Commonwealth of Virginia recorded as deceased from January 1979 through October 2014. If SSA were to correct these discrepancies, it would prevent approximately \$629,000 in additional improper payments after death over a 12-month period. We also identified 27,172 non-beneficiaries who were deceased according to the Virginia Department of Health but whose death information was not in SSA's Numident at the time of our review.

The Numident contained death information for each of the six representative payees. However, at the time of our data match, SSA had not replaced them. By June 2020, SSA had replaced five and suspended payments to one.

### Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of September 2020, SSA had terminated benefits to 30 of the 42 deceased beneficiaries and 5 of the 6 representative payees. SSA had also initiated recovery of \$2 million in improper payments. SSA or our Office of Investigations is reviewing the remaining cases.

### Recommendation

We recommend SSA take action to record deaths on the Numident, terminate payments, and initiate collection of overpayments, as appropriate, for the remaining deceased beneficiaries we identified.

SSA agreed with our recommendation.