

Match of California Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

A-06-14-24138



April 2017

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether death information on California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Death Statistical Master Files was recorded on Social Security Administration (SSA) records. We also determined the status of six cases from our 2014 audit of *Payments to Individuals with Deaths Reported in California from 1980 to 1987 (A-06-14-21416)* that were pending Office of Investigations review or SSA verification.

Background

As part of our 2014 audit, we obtained CDPH data that identified the personally identifiable information (PII) of approximately 1.2 million numberholders recorded as having died in California between 1980 and 1987. We matched the data against SSA records and identified 14 cases where SSA issued approximately \$3 million in improper payments to deceased beneficiaries. We also identified about 64,000 non-beneficiary numberholders who were likely deceased but did not have death information on the Numident.

For this review, we purchased CDPH Death Statistical Master Files for the period 1970 through 2004. We matched the data file against SSA payment records and identified beneficiaries in current payment status whose PII matched a deceased individual in the CDPH file.

Findings

Death information on CDPH files was not always recorded on SSA records. At the time of our audit, SSA was issuing benefit payments to 83 individuals whose PII matched that of individuals who died in California from 1970 through 2004.

- In 34 cases, the beneficiaries were deceased. SSA terminated benefits to 28 beneficiaries and identified approximately \$4.6 million in improper payments. SSA suspended payments to five beneficiaries but had not quantified the related improper payments. We estimate improper payments in these five cases totaled approximately \$1.2 million. The remaining case did not involve improper payments.
- In 43 cases, the beneficiaries were alive. SSA and the Office of Investigations determined that none of the cases involved improper payments to the beneficiaries.
- In six cases, SSA was determining the beneficiaries' status. The Office of Operations referred the cases to its regional offices for development.

We also identified approximately 188,000 numberholders who were likely deceased but had no death information on the Numident. At the time of our review, none of these numberholders was receiving SSA payments. We provided SSA with the numberholders' information, and SSA recorded death information on most of these records.

Of the six open cases from our prior review, the Office of Investigations confirmed that four beneficiaries were deceased. SSA terminated the payments and identified \$632,001 in improper payments issued after these beneficiaries' deaths. In the two remaining cases, SSA confirmed the beneficiaries were alive.

Because SSA took prompt action to suspend or terminate benefits and add numberholders' death information to its records, we made no recommendations for further corrective action.