

Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance Benefits to Individuals Who Are Recorded as Deceased on the Supplemental Security Record

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) was incorrectly issuing Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) benefits to individuals who were recorded as deceased on the Agency's Supplemental Security Record (SSR).

Background

The OASDI program provides benefits to retired and disabled workers, including their dependents and survivors. Under OASDI, benefits are not payable for the month of the beneficiary's death and later. SSA records OASDI payments on its Master Beneficiary Record (MBR). The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program provides payments to financially needy individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled. Under the SSI program, payments are not payable the month after the recipient's death and later. SSA records SSI payments on the SSR. When SSA receives a death report, policy requires that it terminate the decedent's payments, record death information on the Numident and payment records, and initiate recovery for any payments issued for the month of death and later.

In December 2017, we referred to SSA 233 beneficiaries to whom the Agency continued issuing OASDI benefits but who had dates of death on the SSR.

Findings

SSA incorrectly paid \$1.1 million to 63 individuals. This consisted of approximately

- \$1 million in OASDI benefits to 23 individuals whom SSA recorded as deceased on the SSR; and
- \$111,000 in underpayments due 40 SSI recipients.

There were no payment errors for the remaining 170 beneficiaries we reviewed for whom SSA had inconsistent death information on its records.

All 233 beneficiaries we referred to SSA had errors on their records—either the death on the SSR was incorrect and the beneficiary was still alive or OASDI payments were being issued to a deceased beneficiary. SSA reported the 233 beneficiary death discrepancies occurred because of administrative or data entry errors. SSA corrected the death discrepancies during this audit thereby preventing additional incorrect payments.

Agency Actions Resulting from the Audit

As of May 2020, SSA had terminated benefits to 23 deceased beneficiaries and initiated recovery of approximately \$985,000 in incorrect payments. For the 233 beneficiaries we identified, where appropriate, SSA either removed the incorrect dates of death from the SSR or posted the correct dates of death to the Numident and MBR/SSR. As of July 2020, the Agency issued SSI underpayments totaling approximately \$48,000.

Recommendations

We made two recommendations related to the beneficiaries we identified and one recommendation for SSA to prevent date of death discrepancies between the MBR and the SSR.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.