



Office of the Inspector General

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Management Advisory Report

Match of Puerto Rico Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

022332 | *January 2024*



Office of the Inspector General

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 18, 2024

Refer To: 022332

To: Martin O'Malley
Commissioner

From: Gail S. Ennis *Gail S. Ennis*
Inspector General

Subject: Match of Puerto Rico Death Information Against Social Security Administration Records

The attached final report presents the results of the Office of Audit's review. The objective was to determine whether the Social Security Administration issued payments to beneficiaries who were deceased according to Puerto Rico vital statistics records.

We are not making formal recommendations for corrective action; the Agency should take action on those cases it deems appropriate. However, we request the Agency inform us whether it agrees or disagrees with our estimates of payments issued after death. If you wish to discuss the final report, please call me or have your staff contact Michelle L. Anderson, Assistant Inspector General for Audit.

Attachment

ABBREVIATIONS

PII Personally Identifiable Information

SSA Social Security Administration

OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued payments to beneficiaries¹ who were deceased according to Puerto Rico vital statistics records.

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to an Office of the Inspector General subpoena, we obtained Puerto Rico's Vital Statistics Office data that contained the personally identifiable information (PII) of 190,098 individuals Puerto Rico recorded as deceased from January 1, 2017 to December 31, 2022. We processed the data through the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Enumeration Verification System and against SSA payment records and identified 235 beneficiaries in current or suspended payment status whose PII matched that of deceased individuals in the Puerto Rico death data and who received payments from SSA after their dates of death recorded in the Puerto Rico death data.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

Before our audit, SSA independently determined it had issued approximately \$102,000 in improper payments to 10 of the 235 beneficiaries after death and terminated their benefit payments. If the remaining 225 beneficiaries are confirmed to be deceased, we estimate SSA issued approximately \$4.9 million in improper payments after their deaths.² Identifying and correcting these discrepancies would prevent an additional approximately \$1.9 million in payments after death over 12 months.³ We referred 70 of the 225 cases to SSA in December 2023. The Office of Investigations is reviewing the remaining cases and will coordinate referral of them to SSA, as appropriate.

Payment Statuses of Beneficiaries Identified

Of the 235 beneficiaries we identified, 184 were in current payment status within SSA's payment records. Some examples follow:

- A retirement beneficiary died in April 2017. SSA's records did not contain a date of death and therefore benefit payments continued. As of September 2023, SSA had issued approximately \$126,000 in payments after death.
- A widow receiving survivor benefits died in November 2017. SSA's records did not contain a date of death and therefore benefit payments continued. As of September 2023, SSA had issued approximately \$61,000 in payments after death.

¹ We use the term "beneficiary" throughout this report in reference to Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance beneficiaries and/or Supplemental Security Income recipients.

² We calculated the payment amounts made after death through September 2023.

³ We multiplied the monthly payment amount of each beneficiary in current pay as of September 2023 by 12 to estimate the payment amount that would be released over the 12 months that followed September 2023.

- A disability beneficiary died in January 2018. SSA's records did not contain a date of death and therefore benefit payments continued. As of September 2023, SSA had issued approximately \$112,000 in payments after death.

The remaining 51 beneficiaries were in suspended payment status when we conducted our review. However, SSA paid 44 of these beneficiaries approximately \$256,000 after their dates of death in the Puerto Rico death data and before it placed them in suspended pay status. Terminating their records because of death, as the Puerto Rico death data suggest should have been done, will prevent any possibility of them returning to current payment status and SSA paying additional payments after their deaths.

Requested Action

We request that SSA review the cases provided and terminate benefits for the beneficiaries it confirms are deceased, as they appear to be based on the Puerto Rico death data. Because payments should not be made after beneficiaries' deaths, SSA should initiate overpayment collections for any such payments. Should the Agency suspect fraud to have occurred in any of the cases, please refer the allegations to our Office of Investigations.



Michelle L. Anderson
Assistant Inspector General for Audit



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