

SSA Death Master File & NCHS National Death Index: How do they relate?

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Purpose and Goal of the SSA DMF

PURPOSE:

- To gather information on deaths of US citizens receiving SSA benefits. Sources include family members, funeral homes, hospitals, States, Federal agencies, postal authorities and financial institutions.

GOAL:

- To prevent fraud and abuse of federally funded benefits provided by SSA and other federal agencies.

History of the SSA DMF

- Originally began in 1936.
- The law permits SSA to provide death records, including state records, to agencies that pay federally funded benefits.
- Created the public DMF in 1980 in response to a 1978 FOIA lawsuit.
- Available from NTIS
- In 2002, began disclosing state EDR records on the public DMF.

History of the SSA DMF cont.

- **In 2010/2011, SSA began examining their disclosure of protected state records.**
- **Section 205(r) of the Social Security Act prohibits SSA from disclosing State death records.**
- **Beginning Nov. 1, 2011, SSA decided it would withdraw state death records from the public file.**

What does this mean for users of the SSA public DMF?

- **The public DMF will continue to contain non-state records, but will be reduced by 1 million state records annually.**
- **The public historical file of 89 million records will be reduced by 4.2 million records.**
- **Agencies that pay federally funded benefits may still qualify to access the complete SSA DMF in-house file.**

Challenges using the SSA public DMF for research

- **Not a complete file of all deaths.
(More likely to miss younger people because they do not receive SSA benefits.)**
- **Accuracy is not guaranteed.**
- **Occasionally live people are listed.**
- **The absence of a name does not mean they are alive.**
- **No cause of death provided.**

Biggest advantages to the SSA public DMF?

- **It's CHEAP - can range from approximately \$1000 - \$2000 for each file.**
- **Relatively fast**

The National Death Index: Purpose and Goal

Purpose:

- **To construct a database of all deaths in the USA from 1979 forward, including name, other demographics, and cause of death, from death certificates provided by 54 reporting areas.**

Goal:

- **To provide a matching service for health researchers to obtain passive, long-term follow-up for their study participants.**

History of the NDI

- **The NDI began in 1982.**
- **Supported with funding from NIH until 1990-1 (\approx \$680k / yr at first. Dropped to \$300k by 1990).**
- **Initially charged 10¢ per record per year searched.**
- **No cause-of-death available. Only fact-of-death.**
- **Increased to 15¢ per record per year searched in 1990. Became self supporting**

History of the NDI cont.

- **Added cause-of-death in 1997, after years of negotiation with the states.**
- **Price increased to 21¢ per record per year searched for cause-of-death.**
- **In 2009 the NDI (with NAPHSIS) developed volume discounts for very large users (e.g. >2.5 million).**
- **The NDI totally self-supporting. It will give back \$3.8 million to states this year.**

Advantages of the NDI

- **The NDI is highly accurate. Only source of death information is death certificates.**
- **The NDI has cause-of-death.**
- **All ages are accurately represented.**
- **Data are kept strictly confidential. All matches are done in-house.**
- **Revenue is generated for the states, who own the data.**

Disadvantages of the NDI

- **Even though the costs are very low compared to the \$5-\$40 per certificate charged by the states, the costs of NDI matching can still be prohibitive for some users.**
- **Our data files historically have not been available for matching until 15-18 months after the end of the calendar year. This is due to the delay in closing out the COD file.**

Proposed Option for NDI Users

- **NCHS gets $\approx 93\%$ - 95% of all fact-of-death information from the states within 6 months after the calendar year close.**
- **Create a separate fact-of-death file for a matching service for early users, at 6 months.**
- **Still 15¢ per record per year searched, but would include one repeat request when the complete file closes out.**
- **Could be done this year**

Proposed Option for NDI Users

- Longer term ... as COD is sent to NCHS quicker from states through expanded EDRs in states ... we can provide COD information as quickly as fact of death.