
Unclaimed Life Insurance Benefits: Consumer Questions and Answers

Q: How can I find out if my relative or loved one had a life insurance policy?

A: If you believe you might be the beneficiary of an unclaimed policy, reach out to the life insurance provider directly. Every provider has systems in place to find out if the deceased individual had a policy with their company. The American Council of Life Insurers' (ACLI) website offers additional [suggestions](#) to help you search for your loved one's policy.

Q: If I am the beneficiary of a life insurance policy, do I have to file a claim to receive my benefits?

A: Yes, state laws require that life insurance companies pay benefits only after they have received a claim. ACLI's website has information on steps you should follow to [file a life insurance claim](#).

Q: Why do beneficiaries have to file a claim before they can receive their policy?

A: State laws require life insurers to pay a benefit only after they have received a claim and the death of the insured individual has been confirmed. Just as you have to submit a claim to a car insurer after an accident, the normal process with life insurers is to submit a claim before payment is made. This process also assures that no one else can fraudulently claim your benefits.

However, many companies have gone well beyond what the law requires to identify policy owners who have died, locate their beneficiaries and begin the claims process.

Q: What do life insurance companies do to find the beneficiaries of unclaimed policies?

A: Most life insurance companies go well beyond what the law requires to identify policy owners who have passed away with unclaimed benefits. This includes checking their records against the Social Security Administration's Death Master File and other resources to identify policy owners who have died, locate their beneficiaries and begin the claims process.

In fact, the American Council of Life Insurers, which represents most of the life insurance industry, supports the enactment in all state legislatures of a national standard requiring all companies to regularly compare their records with deaths recorded by the Death Master File.

Q: What happens when nobody claims a policy?

A: Most policies are eventually claimed by beneficiaries. In the small percentages of cases when no claim is made, the laws in each state are clear on how all life insurers must handle unclaimed benefits and when those benefits default to government handling. These laws vary from state to state.

And while the law requires life insurers to pay only after a claim is received, most in the industry have gone well beyond what the law requires to identify policy owners who have died with unclaimed benefits.

Companies are turning to new ways to identify policy owners who have died but their policies' benefits have yet to be claimed. They are making better use of technologies to compare their records against the Social Security Administration's Death Master File and other resources to identify beneficiaries of unclaimed life insurance policies.

The industry supports the enactment in all state legislatures of a national standard requiring all companies to regularly compare their records with deaths recorded by the Social Security Administration's Death Master File. When a match is found, companies try to locate the policy's beneficiaries to begin the claims process.

Q: If I'm a policy owner, what can I do to ensure my policy's benefits are claimed?

A: Many life insurance benefits go unclaimed because the beneficiaries did not know a life insurance policy existed or the policy cannot be located. If you own a life insurance policy, let your beneficiaries know where it is located. Keep it with other financial records or legal papers, or anywhere your survivors are likely to look for it if they need to file a claim.

Keep your agent's name and contact information easily accessible. The agent can help your beneficiaries fill out the necessary forms and act as an intermediary with the insurance company.

March 2016