
Program Memorandum Intermediaries/Carriers

Department of Health and
Human Services (DHHS)
HEALTH CARE FINANCING
ADMINISTRATION (HCFA)

Transmittal AB-00-60

Date: JUNE 2000

CHANGE REQUEST 1216

SUBJECT: FUTURE SOFTWARE RELEASES

HCFA intends to continue to closely manage Medicare standard system software changes to assure that an effective change control process is in place. This means that maintainers must receive approval from their HCFA system maintenance lead (see section VI) or HCFA project officer before any follow-up release by the standard system maintainer can be scheduled and installed.

I. Control of System Changes

All maintainers of the standard systems (CWF, FISS, APASS, MCS, VMS, GTEMS, and HPBSS systems) must use the same quarterly release schedule, i.e., on or about January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1. The specific schedule for each quarterly release will be determined by HCFA.

All follow-up release changes (except emergencies) to the quarterly schedule must be held and released on a predetermined schedule in coordination with HCFA. Emergency changes may be released as problems are identified without prior approval. The schedule for follow-up release of changes must be forwarded to your HCFA system maintenance lead or HCFA project officer for prior approval.

Follow-up release changes are to be limited to the correction of priority 1 and 2 problems and errors that prevent effective operation of the production system. Priority 3, priority 4 and/or priority 5 problems may be corrected in a follow-up release when pre-approved by HCFA. The HCFA maintenance lead will advise you of the approval decision within 24 - 48 hours.

If a system problem is identified, Medicare organizations must submit documentation to their HCFA system maintenance lead outlining the problem and the reason correction is needed at this time. Section V of this instruction outlines the minimum information required by HCFA for approval.

II. Problem Priority Classifications for Follow-Up Releases

Listed below are HCFA's problem priority classifications and examples. These are similar to the problem priority classifications that were used for the Y2K re-certification testing period.

Emergency - An emergency includes any change in which code must be fixed immediately in order for the normal standard system functions or services to continue. For example, the system is down in a mainline job causing the cycle to not complete. The maintainer may make emergency changes on its own authority. These corrections must be reported to the HCFA maintenance lead or to the project officer the next business day.

Priority 1 - The problem prevents the accomplishment of a mission critical capability. This means the problem prevents the payment of benefits. For example, the system is pricing a significant volume of claims incorrectly causing over or under payment of claims. There is no manual work-around to fix this problem. The maintainer may make priority 1 changes on its own authority. These corrections must be reported to the HCFA maintenance lead or to the project officer the next business day.

Priority 2 - The problem adversely affects the accomplishment of a mission critical capability so as to degrade performance and for which no alternative work-around is known. This means the problem adversely affects the payment of benefits, the completion of HCFA required reporting, or inaccurate information is being sent providers, beneficiaries or HCFA so as to degrade performance and for which no alternative work-around is known. For example, the information on an outgoing document to the provider community is incorrect. There is no manual work around to fix this problem. The system maintainer must request HCFA approval to implement.

Priority 3 - The problem adversely affects the accomplishment of mission critical capability so as to degrade performance and for which an alternative work-around is known. This means the problem adversely affects the payment of benefits or completion of HCFA required reporting so as to degrade performance and for which an alternative work-around is known. There is a manual work-around in place to handle the situation until changes are made to fix the problem. The system maintainer must request HCFA approval to implement.

Priority 4 - The problem is an operator inconvenience or annoyance, which does not affect a required mission essential capability. This means the problem is an operator inconvenience or annoyance, which does not affect payment of benefits or the completion of HCFA required reporting. The system maintainer must request HCFA approval to implement.

Priority 5 - All other documented system problems. These could include operator errors, an inability to reproduce the reported problem, a problem with insufficient information, a documentation error, such as in a user's manual that incorrectly specifies proper operation, or a situation that results in a request for a change or enhancement. The system maintainer must request HCFA approval to implement.

Below are some examples of the problem priorities 1-5:

Emergencies:

- Production abends, inability to run a cycle; and
- File loss.

Priority 1:

- Inaccurate payment or no payment of claims with significant dollar impact, or requiring significant claims volume to be held;
- Correct payment of claims that was corrupted by recent fixes or changes;
- Necessary file updates cannot be accomplished (payment files, history files);
- Interface failures affecting a mission critical capability; and
- Problems that affect the integrity of multiple processes.

Priority 2:

- Inaccurate payment or no payment of claims where claims volume or dollar amount is small;
- Interface failures;
- Problems that affect the integrity of multiple processes; and
- Inaccurate messages to the beneficiary, provider or HCFA.

Priorities 3, 4 and 5:

- Problems correctable by contractor workarounds;

- Impact of problem is minimal;
- Problem affects non mission critical functions; and
- Contractor requested enhancements.

III. Routine File Maintenance/Updates

HCFA does not require pre-approval or special documentation of routine file maintenance/updates or other routine activities necessary for effective operation of the Medicare system, Medicare processes and/or testing (e.g., MR/UR screen updates, provider and beneficiary file updates). All contractors and data centers should continue with their normal file maintenance routines.

IV. Testing Prior to Installation of HCFA Approved Follow-Up Releases

HCFA issued a Program Memorandum AB-00-25 (CR# 1027) dated April 2000, to explain HCFA's expectation for each Medicare organization's testing responsibility (i.e., standard system maintainers testing, Contractor testing, CWF host testing, Beta testing).

V. Information Required for Requesting HCFA Approval

The following information must be submitted to the HCFA maintenance lead or project officer when requesting that a problem be implemented in a follow-up release. If the system maintainer already has a process in place for communicating system problems to HCFA, that process may be used as long as all information below, at a minimum, is captured.

MAINTAINER NAME:

Problem Description:

Brief non-technical business description of the fix.

How Found:

Explain how the problem was found. Also explain why you believe it was not found by release testing.

Problem Impact:

This information is needed to determine the scope of the problem in terms of payments, provider types, beneficiaries, number of potential claims impacted, if a work around is available, etc.

Problem Priority Classification:

Is this problem prioritized as an emergency, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.

Release Options:

Explain the options for scheduling and implementing the fix.

Technical Recommendation for Release timing:

Explain the recommended timing for installing the release.

Other Comments:

VI. HCFA System Maintenance Leads

Maintainers must forward schedules and documentation of scheduled changes for pre-approval and documentation of all changes as required in the memorandum to your HCFA maintenance lead as indicated below. If your current process is to forward this information to your project officer, continue to do so. Your HCFA maintenance leads will advise you of backup staff.

Standard System	Maintenance Lead
APASS	Linda Holcomb - 410-786-1137 LHolcomb@hcfa.gov
CWF	John Cain - 410-786-6990 JCain@hcfa.gov
MCS	Maureen Hoppa - 410- 786-6958 - MHoppa@hcfa.gov
FISS	Karen Allen -410-786-1705 - KAllen1@hcfa.gov
GTEMS	Lorraine Zicha -410-786-0048 - LZicha@hcfa.gov
HPBSS	Whitney Korangkool - 410-786-0551 - WKorangkool@hcfa.gov
VMS (B, DMERC)	Leticia Swanston - 410-786-6971 - LSwanston@hcfa.gov

The *effective date* for this Program Memorandum (PM) is July 1, 2000.

The *implementation date* for this PM is July 1, 2000.

These instructions should be implemented within your current operating budget.

This PM may be discarded after July 1, 2001.

If you have any questions, contact Lorraine Zicha via e-mail at LZicha@hcfa.gov.