

# Program Memorandum Intermediaries/Carriers

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

Transmittal AB-01-55

Date: APRIL 11, 2001

## CHANGE REQUEST 1569

**SUBJECT: Information Collection Requirements from Medicare Contractor Call Centers**

This Program Memorandum (PM) explains the Health Care Financing Administration's (HCFA) intent to collect and study information from the Medicare provider contractor call centers, and in blended call centers for the provider operations, for FY 2000 and for the first 4 months of FY 2001. Please submit this data as described below by May 15, 2001, to Amy Abel-Matkins ([Abelmatkins@HCFA.gov](mailto:Abelmatkins@HCFA.gov)) at HCFA central office. We will use this data to improve the level of customer service and, if needed, to create new standards or fine tune existing standards for future data collection. The end result is to ensure a fast, friendly, and efficient means by which provider questions and concerns can be resolved.

Because the evaluation of provider call center operations is a new activity for HCFA this fiscal year, we will not be calling vulnerabilities or deficiencies on contractors who are making a good faith effort to meet standards. We expect the call centers to make every effort to meet these standards. We will evaluate contractors' ability to meet the standards, the relevance of those standards to provider call center operations, and conduct site visits to contractors' call centers in order to collect baseline data. The baseline data will be used to set meaningful provider call center performance standards for FY 2002. Conference calls will be held to fully describe the FY 2001 process.

After the initial submission on May 15, 2001, the same information will be gathered on a monthly basis using a select group of measures that have been derived with slight modification from the Beneficiary Customer Service Assessment Management System (CSAMS.) Data should be submitted to Amy Abel-Matkins ([Abelmatkins@HCFA.gov](mailto:Abelmatkins@HCFA.gov)) at HCFA central office by the fifteenth day of the month after which the data was collected. Excel worksheets have been provided to record the data results, however, no calculations leading to those results need to be shown. We recognize the possibility that information may not be available for the requested timeframe because it may predate the installation of toll-free service. However, we expect to receive all data that your switches allow to be captured from the general provider inquiry line. If information is not available, justification must be included so that the omission will be understood. It is not acceptable to leave a section of the worksheet blank without providing your reasons for doing so. The following summary explains the measures that will be used and includes the methods of calculation.

### **ALL TRUNKS BUSY (ATB) - EXTERNAL TOLL FREE LINES**

An ATB situation occurs when every trunk into the call center, that providers/suppliers access, is unable to accept incoming calls because they are either occupied by other callers or are non-operational for other reasons. This results in incoming callers receiving a busy signal when trying to connect to the call center, until one or more trunks are made available due to a caller disconnecting or non-operational trunks becoming operational.

The ATB - External measure is the percentage of callers that receive a busy signal while trying to reach the call center because of an ATB situation, in relation to the total number of callers that attempted a call to the call center.

Any situation that disturbs the usual operation of the call center, and results in extreme variances in the call center's performance level, will be considered as an exceptional event and reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

## Requirement

This requirement is based only on toll free lines for providers/suppliers. This measure is for monitoring purposes only.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{Number of Busy Calls}}{\text{Number of Calls}}$$

## Data Source

The Inter-Exchange Carrier (WorldCom) should generate a monthly report detailing the total number of calls that received a busy signal, and the total number of monthly calls offered to the call center. This information should be available through WorldCom's Interact suite of services.

## Data Points

- Number of Busy Calls (Callers unable to access call center)
- Number of Calls (Total number of calls offered to call center)

## ATB - INTERNAL

An ATB situation occurs when every trunk into the call center, that providers/suppliers access, is unable to accept incoming calls because they are either occupied by other callers or are non-operational for any other reason. This results in incoming callers receiving a busy signal when trying to connect to the call center, until one or more trunks are made available due to a caller disconnecting or non-operational trunks becoming operational. The ATB internal is the percentage of time callers received a busy signal due to an ATB situation, in relation to the total amount of time that the call center is in operation.

Any situation that disturbs the usual operation of the call center, and results in extreme variances in the call center's performance level will be considered an exceptional event and reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

## Requirement

Contractors shall average a monthly ATB Internal Rate of no more than 10 percent. Any exceptions to this performance level should be annotated in the monthly report.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{Minutes Call Center is not Available}}{\text{Minutes Call Center is Operational}}$$

## Data Source

ATB Internal can be measured by the call center's telephone system, which generates a monthly report detailing the total number of minutes in which all trunks were busy, and the total monthly minutes in which the call center was operational.

## Data Points

- Minutes Call Center is Not Available (Total minutes callers were unable to access call center)
- Minutes Call Center is Operational (Total minutes in which the call center was staffed and operational)

## SERVICE LEVEL INDICATOR - 120 SECONDS

In most call centers, when a provider/supplier dials the call center number(s), they are first connected to the Automated Call Distributor (ACD) system. The ACD then performs one of the following operations:

If an Interactive Voice Response Unit (IVR) system exists, the ACD gives the provider/supplier the option of receiving automated information from the IVR or being placed directly into the ACD queue to wait for a customer service representative (CSR). Those customers that choose the IVR option can still decide to exit from the IVR system and be returned to the ACD queue to wait for a CSR.

If an IVR system does not exist, the ACD delivers them directly into a queue within the ACD system where they will wait for the next available CSR.

If a call center connects callers to an IVR system when they first dial in, calls will be considered in queue only after they are delivered to the ACD.

This service level indicator is the percentage of provider/supplier calls that are answered by a live representative within 120 seconds of their delivery to the ACD queue. This delivery takes place, as described above, either upon their initial dial-in to the system or their selection of the IVR option to be connected to a CSR. This measure does not include providers/suppliers who are placed into the queue but abandon their calls before 120 seconds.

### Requirement

For callers choosing to talk with a CSR, 97.5 percent or more telephone calls shall be answered within 120 seconds, excluding any abandoned calls under 120.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{Calls Answered} \leq 120 \text{ Seconds}}{(\text{Calls in ACD Queue(s)}) - (\text{Calls Abandoned} \leq 120 \text{ Seconds})}$$

### Data Source

The call center's telephone system reports should provide the total number of calls that were answered within 120 seconds, the total volume of calls that are placed into the ACD queue, and the total calls abandoned before 120 seconds in the queue.

### Data Points

Calls Answered  $\leq$  120 Seconds (Calls answered by CSRs within 120 seconds)

Calls in ACD Queue (Total monthly number of calls delivered to the ACD Queue)

Calls Abandoned  $\leq$  120 Seconds (Calls abandoned before or at 120 seconds in ACD queue)

## SERVICE LEVEL INDICATOR - 60 SECONDS

In most call centers, when a provider/supplier dials the call center number(s), they are first connected to the ACD system. The ACD then performs one of the following operations:

If an IVR system exists, the ACD gives the provider/supplier the option of receiving automated information from the IVR or being placed directly into the queue to wait for a CSR. Those customers that choose the IVR option can still decide to exit from the IVR system and be returned to the CSR queue within the ACD system.

If an IVR system does not exist, the ACD delivers them directly into a queue within the ACD system where they will wait for the next available CSR.

If a call center connects callers to an IVR system when they first dial in, calls will be considered in queue only after they are delivered to the ACD. Any IVR's that are configured to hold callers until the queue times are acceptable will be handled, if the need arises, on a case-by-case basis.

This service level indicator is the percentage of provider/supplier calls that are answered by a live representative within 60 seconds of their delivery to the ACD queue. This delivery takes place, as described above, either upon their initial dial into the system or their selection of the IVR option to be connected to a live representative. This measure does not include providers/suppliers who are placed into the queue but abandon their calls before 60 seconds.

### **Requirement**

For callers choosing to talk with a CSR, no less than 85 percent of telephone calls should be answered within the first 60 seconds.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{Answered } \leq 60 \text{ Seconds}}{(\text{Calls in ACD Queue(s)}) - (\text{Abandoned } \leq 60 \text{ Seconds})}$$

### **Data Source**

The call center's telephone system reports should provide the total number of calls that were answered within 60 seconds, the total volume of calls that are placed into the ACD queue, and the total calls abandoned before 60 seconds while in the queue.

### **Data Points**

- Answered <= 60 Seconds (Calls answered by CSR within 60 seconds)
- Calls in ACD Queue (Total monthly calls delivered to ACD queue)
- Abandoned <= 60 Seconds (Calls abandoned before or at 60 seconds in ACD queue)

### **Average Speed of Answer (ASA) - formerly referred to as Call Acknowledgement**

The ASA is the average time, in seconds, that all calls waited before being connected to a CSR. This includes ringing, delay recorder(s), and music. This time begins when the provider/supplier call enters the CSR queue and includes both calls delayed and those answered immediately in the calculation. In those call centers where beneficiary and provider calls are delivered to the same queue and cannot be separated, report the combined ASA.

### **Requirement**

Report monthly Average Speed of Answer in seconds. This is for measurement purposes only.

### **Data Source**

The call center's telephone system can provide the average speed of answer that calls waited before being answered by a CSR.

### **Data Points**

Average Speed of Answer (ASA)

### **CALL ABANDONMENT RATE - FOR CSR QUEUE**

Call Abandonment Rate is the percentage of provider/supplier callers that were abandoned prior to connecting with a CSR divided by the total number of calls delivered into the ACD queue. Abandoned calls will be tracked as two separate measures: Calls abandoned up to and including 120 seconds, and calls abandoned beyond 120 seconds.

## Requirement

Report the number of abandoned calls from the ACD queue. This should be reported as two separate measures: 1) Calls abandoned up to and including 120 seconds, and 2) Calls abandoned after 120 seconds. These data elements are for monitoring and tracking purposes. A future benchmark may be established.

### Calculation:

Up to 120 seconds       $\frac{\text{Calls Abandoned } \leq 120 \text{ Seconds}}{\text{Calls in ACD queue}}$

Beyond 120 seconds       $\frac{\text{Calls Abandoned } > 120 \text{ Seconds}}{\text{Calls in ACD queue}}$

### Data Source

The call center's telephone system reports should provide the total number of calls that were terminated before 120 seconds, as well as the total volume of calls placed in the ACD queue and those not answered within 120 seconds.

### Data Points

Calls Abandoned  $\leq$  120 Seconds (Calls abandoned from ACD queue before or at 120 seconds)

Calls Abandoned  $>$  120 Seconds (Calls abandoned from ACD queue after 120 seconds)

Calls in ACD queue (Total monthly calls delivered to the ACD queue)

## INITIAL CALL RESOLUTION

Some provider/supplier calls require additional research, interaction with specialists, etc. in order to resolve the provider/supplier's issues or questions regarding Medicare. Initial call resolution measures the percentage of occurrences that a provider/supplier's inquiry is resolved during their initial contact with a Medicare representative. A provider/supplier inquiry resolved during the initial call, is defined as a call that does not require a return call(s) by the provider/supplier or CSR.

### Requirement

Providers/suppliers should obtain closure on open issues or questions during their initial call no less than 80 percent of the time. A call is considered to be resolved initially when a call ends with a complete and accurate answer being provided the caller or the call is transferred/referred to another representative or information source to be resolved.

**Calculation:**       $\frac{\text{Calls Answered by CSRs} - \text{Number Callbacks Required}}{\text{Calls Answered by CSRs}}$

### Data Source

The call center's contact management system, which tracks the status of each provider/supplier call, should have features that enable the representative to note whether the caller's main issue was resolved or required a callback. Manual tabulation is sufficient for reporting purposes. The telephone system should provide the total number of callers per month.

## Data Points

- Number Callbacks Required (Calls requiring callbacks to resolve provider/supplier issue)
- Calls Answered by CSRs

## CALLBACK COMPLETION

Provider/supplier calls that are not resolved by the representative during the first call due to a need for further information, contact with another representative, etc. These calls may necessitate a callback to the provider/supplier from the representative or someone else in the call center in order to resolve the provider/supplier's inquiry. Callbacks in response to voicemail messages do not fall within this definition.

Callback completion measures the percentage of callbacks to providers/suppliers that were made within the required amount of time. This measure ensures that provider/supplier's inquiries are resolved in an efficient and timely manner even when they cannot be resolved during their initial call.

Contact management systems should have the capability of tracking callbacks. After the initial call is received and a callback is deemed necessary, special conditions will be taken into consideration depending on the provider/supplier's request (i.e., a provider/supplier requests a callback "next week").

## Requirement

Report the status of those calls not resolved at first contact. These data elements are for monitoring and tracking purposes. A future benchmark may be established. Those calls should be reported as follows:

Callbacks required (This number is based on calls received for the calendar month and represents the number requiring a callback as of the last workday of the month);

Callbacks closed within 2 workdays (This number is based on calls received for the calendar month and represents the number closed as of the last workday of the month);

Callbacks closed within 5 workdays (This number is based on calls received for the calendar month and represents the number closed as of the last workday of the month); and

Callbacks pending over 20 workdays (The number represents all callbacks currently pending on the last workday of the month).

## Calculation

Callbacks Closed in 2 Days: 
$$\frac{\text{Number of Callbacks in 2 workdays}}{\text{Number of Callbacks required}}$$

Callbacks Closed in 5 Days: 
$$\frac{\text{Number of Callbacks in 5 workdays}}{\text{Number of Callbacks required}}$$

Callbacks Pending Over 20 Days: Number of Callbacks Pending Over 20 workdays

## Data Source

The call center's contact management system, which tracks the status of each provider/supplier call, should have the ability to generate reports that show how many callbacks were required, how many were made within two and five working days, and those pending over 20 working days. Some call centers are performing this manually, and should be sufficient for reporting purposes.

## Data Points

- Callbacks required;
- Callbacks closed within 2 workdays;
- Callbacks closed within 5 workdays; and
- Callbacks pending over 20 workdays average talk time.

## AVERAGE TALK TIME

Average talk time is a measure of the average length of each call once a provider/supplier reaches a representative. Included in talk time would be any time that the caller was placed on hold during the call. The associated wrap-up time for provider/supplier calls should be recorded as a separate measure.

The length of time necessary to address a provider/supplier's question or issue can provide insight into the complexity of questions being asked, the level of training of the representative, and the resources available to call center representatives to effectively address issues. It is best used as a relative rather than an absolute measure, tracking changes over time or comparing different areas of the call center.

## Requirement

Report monthly average talk time. This is for measurement purposes only.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{Seconds CSRs Connected}}{\text{Calls Answered by CSRs}}$$

## Data Source

The call center's telephone system can provide both the total seconds that representatives are connected to callers and the total monthly calls delivered to the representatives.

## Data Points

Seconds CSRs Connected (Total seconds CSRs are connected to callers per month)

Calls Answered by CSRs

## AFTER CALL WORK TIME (ACW)

ACW measures the average time it takes CSRs to perform the necessary actions and documentation after a call is completed. These actions include mailing a form, contacting another CSR or supervisor with specific expertise, and documenting the reason for the call and its resolution.

ACW is a good indicator of the level of efficiency of the call center's processes and information management. For example, a high average ACW may indicate that CSRs are spending their time doing tasks that could be centralized, such as form mailing. It may also indicate that the interface through which they document information is too slow or complicated, or that information is not readily available.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{After Call Work Time}}{\text{Calls Answered by CSRs}}$$

## Data Source

The call center's telephone system can provide both the total seconds that representatives spent on ACW and the total monthly calls delivered to the representatives.

**Data Points**

- ACW Time (Total seconds spent by CSRs performing ACW)
- Calls Answered by CSRs

**OCCUPANCY RATE**

Occupancy is the percent of time CSRs were plugged-in, logged-in and handling calls, making outgoing calls, or in the after call work state. This is the percent of time that a CSR spends in active call handling (i.e., on incoming calls, after call work (wrap-up), outbound calls).

If this field reflects 100 percent, it means that the CSRs were busy the entire time that they were plugged-in and never spent any time in the available state. This would be due to a constant flow of calls into the queue.

Occupancy is a good indicator of the extent to which call handling resources are utilized to handle provider/supplier telephone inquiries. When CSRs are engaged in non-telephone work, the occupancy rate declines.

**Data Source**

The call center's telephone system can provide the occupancy rate for the CSR queue.

**Data Points**

Occupancy Rate (the percent of time CSRs were plugged in, logged in, handling calls, making outgoing calls, or in the after call work state).

**CSR PROFICIENCY TEST**

A CSR proficiency test ensures that new CSRs possess the necessary knowledge to efficiently answer provider/supplier questions and solve their problems, and that experienced CSRs maintain and improve upon their knowledge. This test is developed and administered by the individual call centers, and is to be given to all new CSRs prior to their handling of calls, and to experienced CSRs on an as needed basis.

**Requirement**

Develop a proficiency test to be used for new CSRs and as needed for existing personnel. Target no less than an 80 percent first time pass rate for the proficiency test.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{CSR Proficiency Pass}}{\text{CSR Proficiency Rate}}$$

**Data Source**

The number of CSRs passed and rated can be provided by the individual in the call center responsible for proficiency test administration.

**Data Points**

CSR Proficiency Pass (Number of CSRs that passed)

CSR Proficiency Rate (Number of CSRs that were rated)



## **INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE (IVR) HANDLE RATE**

Providers/suppliers can be delivered to a call center's IVR system either through direct connection at the beginning of a call or through the provider/supplier's selection of the IVR option.

The IVR handle rate is the percentage of calls handled in the IVR divided by the total monthly calls delivered to the call center. For measurement purposes, a call handled in the IVR is defined as any call delivered to the IVR, where the caller: 1) Selected and played at least one informational message from the menu, and 2) Did not subsequently transfer to a CSR. This includes calls delivered to the IVR during or after normal business hours.

Contractors also utilize a feature such as "auto attendant" or "vectoring" where callers opt to make a selection to listen to a message (such as a message concerning a lost Medicare card) to have their questions answered rather than speak to a CSR. Since this feature has basically the same characteristic of an IVR, these calls would also be captured in this measurement.

### **Requirement**

This measure is for monitoring and tracking purposes. A benchmark has yet to be established.

**Calculation:** 
$$\frac{\text{Calls Handled by IVR}}{\text{Calls Offered to the IVR}}$$

### **Data Source**

The telephone system and IVR reports will provide the total monthly calls offered the call center as well as those handled by the IVR.

### **Data Points**

Calls Offered Call Center

Calls Handled by IVR (Total monthly calls delivered to the IVR that are not subsequently transferred to a CSR )

**The *effective date* for this PM is March 30, 2001.**

**The *implementation date* for this PM is May 15, 2001.**

**These instructions should be implemented within your current operating budget.**

**This PM may be discarded after May 15, 2002.**

**If you have any questions, contact Judy Hunt at (410) 786-7874.**

Attachment







