
Program Memorandum Intermediaries/Carriers

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

Transmittal AB-00-84

Date: SEPTEMBER 11, 2000

CHANGE REQUEST 1289

SUBJECT: Provider Toll-Free Telephone Inquiry Service

This Program Memorandum (PM) establishes HCFA's intent to convert existing provider customer service telephone lines at Medicare contractors from "toll lines" to "toll-free," and identifies means contractors should use to publicize this. Providing toll-free telephone service reduces providers' cost of doing business with Medicare. Toll-free telephone service, an agency priority, also represents a HCFA commitment to the principle that no Medicare provider, supplier, or agent acting on behalf of the provider or supplier should have to pay to talk to their Medicare contractor.

The toll-free service will be supplied via WorldCom under its FTS 2001 contract, and the installation and monthly line costs for this toll-free service will be paid directly to WorldCom by HCFA. HCFA will also pay for any equipment necessary to convert existing provider service to toll free service. Lines being converted are all voice lines used by carriers and fiscal intermediaries to receive calls from providers. Lines used for transmission of electronic media claims will not be covered. The new toll-free lines will be available to providers nationwide.

In previous communication, you were initially notified of HCFA's intent to provide toll-free service and efforts underway to achieve this. This included a survey and review of existing telephone service operations at all Medicare contractor call centers, which inventoried the work necessary to convert each to toll-free service. These surveys have been completed. Work orders have been prepared and given to WorldCom, and the conversion process has begun. As soon as installation and testing is completed by WorldCom and the local telephone provider and individual contractor call centers are ready, those contractors' toll lines will be converted during the remainder of the summer to toll-free lines. It is HCFA's objective that all toll-free provider service lines be installed and operating this fall. Prior to September 30, 2000, the level of effort required to meet call center standards for both beneficiary and provider inquiries has been relaxed as described in the May 25 Addendum 2 to the FY 2000 Budgetary and Performance Requirements (BPRs). Standards concerning HCFA's expectations on the performance, operation, and utilization of Medicare provider toll-free service are in the FY 2001 BPRs.

After your toll-free provider service lines have been installed and made operational, it is expected that you will publicize the service to providers you serve. After your lines are operational, you should publish an article about the service in your next regularly scheduled bulletin, and a notice about the toll-free numbers should be placed on all your ensuing bulletins. An announcement about the availability of the service should be prominently displayed and maintained on your Medicare website. Your toll-free numbers should be displayed on any provider education material you publish. An intercept message stating the availability of the toll-free service should be deployed on all existing (toll) lines. You should also publicize the toll-free numbers at all scheduled provider conferences, meetings and workshops. HCFA will soon issue an announcement about the toll-free service that will contain information that should be used within your own publicity efforts.

As soon as the order for your telephone service is prepared, you should receive a copy of your order. The order document contains the date that HCFA has requested for your service to be installed and operational at your call center. In planning for this transition, you should know that currently HCFA is experiencing four-week delays in service installation. The effect of the recent strike by Verizon telecommunications workers on this schedule is not yet known.

HCFA-Pub. 60AB

HCFA does not expect a permanent increase in volume of provider calls as a result of this conversion to toll-free service. However, some current major initiatives, such as Hospital Outpatient and Home Health PPS, may slightly increase call volume in the short term. As toll-free service is initiated and on a continuing basis, HCFA will be monitoring the volume and subject of provider inquiry calls and working to eliminate the reasons for them through education and training activities and information on its web site. We encourage fiscal intermediaries and carriers to similarly monitor the call volume at your own call centers. Although we are willing to work with contractors on the issue of call volume, you should be aware that HCFA's immediate response to any volume increases will not be to add additional staff for the call centers.

The *effective date* for this (PM) is August 1, 2000.

The *implementation date* for this PM is September 30, 2000.

Funding is available through the regular budget process for costs required for implementation.

This PM may be discarded after September 30, 2001.

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