



MEDICARE NEWS

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Initial registration activities reveal strong interest in Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs

Four states issue first Medicaid incentive payments

More than 21,000 providers initiated registration for the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs in January and four states reported initial Medicaid incentive payments totaling \$20,425,550, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services announced today. In addition, the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) announced that as of Feb. 11, 2011, more than 45,000 providers requested information or registration help from 62 Regional Extension Centers (RECs). RECs provide hands-on support for providers who want to adopt and become meaningful users of electronic health information technology. This early interest in the Medicare and Medicaid EHR programs reveals strong support for these programs that will advance health care through improvements in patient safety, quality of care, and patient involvement in treatment options.

Eligible professionals and hospitals must register in order to participate in the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentive programs. Registration opened on Jan. 3, 2011, at http://www.cms.gov/EHRIncentivePrograms/20_RegistrationandAttestation.asp.

Survey results released by ONC on January 13 indicate that “four-fifths of the nation’s hospitals, and 41 percent of office-based physicians, intend to sign up for the incentive payments.” For more information on the survey, please visit: <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2011pres/01/20110113a.html>

“This strong early interest in the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentive programs among providers and state Medicaid programs is most welcome and very encouraging,” said Donald Berwick, M.D., administrator of CMS. “We encourage early adoption, and we’re seeing the registration numbers continue on an upward trajectory. The valuable feedback we’ve in these early weeks of the program helps us to fine-tune our list of frequently asked questions and other resources to increase providers’ understanding of the incentive programs and help them in getting signed up.”

Eleven states have launched Medicaid EHR incentive programs, and incentives have been issued by four states. Highlights include the following:

- On January 5, Oklahoma and Kentucky issued incentives totaling \$2,842,500. Kentucky made an initial payment of \$2.86 million to a teaching hospital, University of Kentucky Healthcare. This payment comprised one-third of the hospital's overall expected amount for participating in the incentive program. On the same day, Kentucky disbursed an incentive of \$1.3 million to Central Baptist Hospital. Also on January 5, Oklahoma issued incentive payments to two physicians at the Gastorf Family Clinic of Durant, Okla., totaling \$42,500 (\$21,250 each), for having adopted certified EHRs.
- On January 12, Louisiana announced a payment of \$63,750 to Winn Community Health Center, the first federally qualified health center (FQHC) in the nation to receive an incentive payment. The incentive payment consisted of \$21,250 for each of three eligible professionals at the clinic.
- During the week of January 17, Iowa issued its first Medicaid EHR incentive payments in the amount of \$21,250 each for two eligible professionals.

Additional Medicaid incentive payments are in process. States that have launched their Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs are Alaska, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. Medicare providers will be able to attest to meaningful use in mid- to late April, and issuance of Medicare payments is scheduled to begin in May.

The Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs were established by the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act (HITECH), part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Under HITECH, Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments will be available to eligible professionals, eligible hospitals, and critical access hospitals (CAHs) when they adopt certified EHR technology and successfully demonstrate "meaningful use" of the technology in ways that improve quality, safety, and effectiveness of patient-centered care.

"The HITECH Act marked a new level of national commitment to health information technology. The implementation of HITECH is in high gear," said David Blumenthal, national coordinator for health information technology. "HHS has built a strong foundation of support, and health care providers are responding. We are seeing a rapidly accelerating pace toward the adoption and meaningful use of EHRs. The result will be better quality and more effective care, which benefits both patients and providers."

For 2011, Medicare eligible professionals and hospitals will demonstrate meaningful use through CMS' web-based Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Program Registration and Attestation System. In the Registration and Attestation System, providers will fill in numerators and denominators for the meaningful use objectives and clinical quality measures, indicate if they qualify for exclusions to specific objectives, and legally attest that they have successfully demonstrated meaningful use. Once providers have completed a successful online submission through the Attestation System, they will be eligible for a Medicare EHR incentive payment. The Attestation System for the Medicare EHR Incentive Program will open in mid- to late April. CMS plans to release additional information about the attestation process soon.

For the Medicaid EHR Incentive Program, providers will follow a similar process using their state's attestation system. Check here to see states' scheduled launch dates for their Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs: <http://www.cms.gov/apps/files/medicaid-HIT-sites/>.

For more information on the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs, visit <http://www.cms.gov/ehrincentiveprograms/>.

For more information on ONC's health information technology activities, visit www.healthit.gov.

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