

September 2017

### Medicare ID Numbers: Out with the Old and In with the New!

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has announced it will be issuing new Medicare identification cards. The **New Medicare Card** project, previously called the Social Security Number Removal Initiative (SSNRI), is another component of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA). Under this initiative, social security numbers will no longer be used to identify Medicare beneficiaries. A new randomly assigned Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI) will be used instead. The social security number - based Health Insurance Claim Number (HICN) is the current Medicare beneficiary ID number. It is used to confirm eligibility for benefits, for claims processing and for communicating with other agencies and organizations such as the Social Security Administration, Rail Road Medicare, State Medicaid agencies, and Medicare Secondary Payers.

Why the change? In a 5/30/17 press release, CMS Administrator Seema Verma states “We’re taking this step to protect our seniors from fraudulent use of Social Security numbers which can lead to identity theft and illegal use of Medicare benefits.” Incidents of identity theft among seniors grew to 2.6 million in 2014, according to the press release.

The first noticeable change in this transition will be an update in terminology on all CMS sites and correspondence. As of July 2017, all references to the HICN will now state “Medicare I.D.” instead. Medicare I.D. will refer to whichever number is currently in use—now it is the HICN and once assigned, it will be the MBI. The MBI will be 11 characters in length and consist of numbers and uppercase letters.

CMS will assign the new Medicare Beneficiary Identifier (MBI) and mail new cards to all Medicare beneficiaries starting April 2018. The new cards and MBI will be active as soon as they are received so make note of the expected transition date. CMS will provide an online MBI lookup tool.

There will be a transition period where both the HICN and the MBI will be acceptable in the Medicare I.D. field on electronic and paper claims. The transition period will begin no later than April 1, 2018 when CMS starts to mail the new cards to beneficiaries and end on December 31, 2019. Your systems will need to be able to accept the new MBI by April 2018. Starting October 2018, only the MBI will be returned to you on claims communications and payments. However, you will not be required to bill with the MBI until the end of the transition period.

CMS typically conducts “end-to-end” testing with any changes that may require updates to their claims processing systems. Such testing can include allowing providers to submit

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sample claims with the new requirements ahead of the implementation date to ensure there are no hiccups once the requirements become effective. You'll remember that there was extensive testing performed leading up to the transition to ICD-10\_CM/PCS. However, CMS will not provide end-to-end testing for the New Medicare Card Project because of the lengthy 21-month transition time. CMS expects physicians and other healthcare entities to start testing their own systems now.

Start preparing for this change now by reading the available materials regarding the change, educating your staff, and preparing to inform your patients to look out for their new cards in April. You should also confirm with your practice management and billing software vendors that they are making the necessary revisions to be able to both house and bill the MBI. CMS recommends the following steps to fully prepare for this transition:

1. Review the CMS provider website and signup for the weekly MLN Connects newsletter;
2. Attend the CMS quarterly calls as announced in the MLN Connects newsletter;
3. Verify all your Medicare patients' addresses, and notify patients if there is a need to update their address with the social security office;
4. Educate your patients about their new Medicare cards; and
5. Test your system changes and make sure your billing and registration staff is ready.

ASA information and CMS resources are available to assist you in this transition through the following links:

[New Medicare Cards \(formerly known as SSNRI\)](#)

[New Medicare Cards](#)

[Medicare Card Messaging Guidelines](#)

[What do the new Medicare cards mean for providers?](#)