



Advance Payments of the Premium Tax Credit (APTC) and Federally-facilitated Exchange (FFE) User Fee Program Assessment Report

for

Premiera Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska

April 17, 2023

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sections 1401 and 1412 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) established the advance payments of the premium tax credit (APTC) program to support the provision of affordable health care coverage to individuals. Additionally, section 1311 of the ACA allows the Federally-facilitated Exchanges (FFE) to charge participating issuers user fees to support FFE operations.

Under title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), sections 156.480 and 156.705, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) may audit issuers that offer a Qualified Health Plan (QHP) in the individual market through an Exchange to assess the degree of compliance with the APTC and FFE user fee program requirements. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) established an audit protocol to assess health insurance issuers' compliance with the following regulations governing APTC and FFE user fee programs and other related applicable Exchange operational standards:

- 45 CFR § 155.400: Enrollment of qualified individuals into QHPs;
- 45 CFR § 155.430: Termination of Exchange enrollment or coverage;
- 45 CFR § 156.50: Financial support;
- 45 CFR § 156.270: Termination of coverage or enrollment for qualified individuals;
- 45 CFR § 156.460: Reduction of enrollee's share of premium to account for advance payments of the premium tax credit;
- 45 CFR § 156.480: Oversight of the administration of the cost-sharing reductions and advance payments of the premium tax credit programs; and
- 45 CFR § 156.705: Maintenance of records for Federally-facilitated Exchanges.

This report is an assessment of Premera Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska (Premera)'s compliance with the APTC and FFE user fee programs. Premera is a health insurance issuer that offered QHPs in the individual market on the FFE in Alaska during the 2017 benefit year. The issuer received a total of \$157,196,860.56 in APTC from CMS and paid a total of \$6,439,410.95 in FFE user fees to CMS for the 2017 benefit year. The payment amounts were calculated using CMS's automated payment system, policy-based payments (PBP). Additionally, the issuer received a total of \$1,952.00 in APTC from CMS and paid a total of \$68.32 in FFE user fees for its 2017 benefit year Unaffiliated Issuer Enrollments (UIEs) that could not be resolved through the standard FFE reconciliation and resolution process.

Based on the assessment of Premera's program participation, if CMS found any instances of issuer non-compliance with APTC and FFE user fee program requirements that requires correction to payment, then CMS classified it as a *finding* in section III. If CMS found a deviation from APTC and FFE user fee program requirements that does not require correction to payment, then CMS categorized it as an *observation* in section IV in order to call management's attention to the issue(s) for purposes of improving compliance in future program years.

As noted in the Payment Policy and Financial Management Group (PPFMG) External Audit Communication letter dated July 19, 2019, consistent with the expiration of the good faith policy at 45 CFR § 156.800(c), CMS may begin imposing civil money penalties (CMPs) for observations identified beginning with benefit year 2020 audits.

II. BACKGROUND AND AUDIT METHODOLOGY

A. PBP Background

Starting in 2016, CMS implemented an automated PBP system to support the collection of FFE user fees and to make monthly payments of APTC. The PBP system calculates the payment and charge amounts based on enrollment information at the policy level. CMS and issuers use the X12 standard 834 enrollment transaction in real time to exchange FFE enrollment data. To confirm the accuracy and consistency of the FFE enrollment data that CMS uses to make automated payments, CMS also conducts a monthly enrollment reconciliation process. CMS provides a Pre-Audit File to issuers containing a snapshot of the FFE database for the benefit year, and issuers respond by submitting an Inbound Reconciliation (RCNI) File to CMS that contains the benefit year's enrollment data as reflected in the issuer's systems. As a part of the reconciliation processes, CMS reconciles the RCNI file with the Pre-Audit File using a set of business rules that reflect CMS's enrollment policy to determine whether updates were required. This process implements a complex set of business rules to determine which issuer enrollment updates are accepted or rejected. The output of the comparison, the Outbound Reconciliation (RCNO) File, is sent to issuers to show which records CMS anticipates updating in the FFE database and which records CMS is directing the issuer to update in their systems. CMS conducted this enrollment reconciliation process for the 2017 benefit year from December 2016 through March 2018.

CMS provided a final opportunity for issuers to compare their 2017 FFE individual enrollment data with the current 2017 enrollment data in the FFE database, via an optional off-cycle enrollment reconciliation process. Unlike typical enrollment reconciliation runs, CMS did not update FFE enrollment data based on the off-cycle enrollment reconciliation. Instead, issuers were encouraged to submit disputes for any outstanding discrepancies resulting from the off-cycle enrollment reconciliation processes that required updates to FFE data.

B. Audit Methodology

On March 16, 2021, Premera was notified by CMS that they were selected for audit for the 2017 benefit year. Once selected, CMS required the submission of a new RCNI file that contained the 2017 benefit year individual market enrollment data as currently reflected in the issuer's systems. CMS also required the submission of policies and procedures, policy documentation for selected samples of policies, and a Premium Payment Data Extract containing premium payment data from the issuer's system for a selected sample of policies. Using the issuer provided data files and documentation, the following audit procedures were performed to assess compliance with APTC and FFE user fee program rules and regulations.

Validations of PBP Payments/Charges based on Data Reported in CMS's Systems through Enrollment Reconciliation

For purposes of the audit, the issuer submitted an updated RCNI file that reflected a current snapshot of individual market enrollment data for the 2017 benefit year. During the audit, CMS reconciled the issuer provided RCNI file with the Pre-Audit File representing the most recent FFE data as of the beginning of the audit to identify any data differences and used the output of the comparison (the audit RCNO file) as the basis for performing the checks in its audit procedures to validate PBP payments. CMS executed audit procedures to identify the policies that have a financial impact listed in section III of this report. CMS referred to its enrollment policy and PBP requirements to develop the audit protocols that determine whether the discrepancies identified through these reviews and comparisons required adjustment to

payment¹. Data differences identified between the issuer's enrollment records and the FFE data in the audit RCNO file were reviewed and communicated to the issuer for resolution or confirmation as part of the audit process. Any policies with the following remaining confirmed data differences that required adjustment to payment after the completion of this process are detailed in an Excel file provided to Premera in conjunction with the draft report:

- 1) Coverage status: Policies that were effectuated in CMS's data but not the issuer's data or vice-versa (referred to as "CMS Unreconciled" or "Issuer Unreconciled", respectively);
- 2) Coverage dates: Policies where the dates of coverage did not align between CMS and the issuer (referred to as "CMS Extra Coverage" or "Issuer Extra Coverage"); and/or
- 3) Financial differences: Policies where premium and resulting FFE user fee and/or APTC amounts differed between CMS's data and the issuer's data (referred to as "Financial Differences with/without Coverage Differences").

Validations of the Correct Application of CMS Enrollment Policy

Using the policy documentation, data files, and policies and procedures provided by the issuer, CMS executed audit procedures to identify the observations listed in section IV of this report. The reviews include the Forty-Five (45) Subscriber Sample Policy-level Documentation Review, Premium Payment Data Extract Validation, and Policies and Procedures Review.

CMS conducted a discrepancy phase following execution of the audit procedures detailed above to work with the issuer to resolve or reduce data differences identified. CMS adjudicated the issuer follow-up and, after the analysis, issued this report.

¹ Enrollment Reconciliation rules are available on <https://www.regtap.info/>.

III. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS WITH FINANCIAL IMPACT

A finding is the identification of an instance of issuer non-compliance with APTC and FFE user fee program requirements that requires correction to payment. CMS's audit procedures identified data differences that resulted in a change to the total APTC payment made to Premera and the total FFE user fees collected from Premera for individual market plans during the 2017 benefit year. The APTC and FFE user fee financial impact is shown in the following table.

APTC Payment and FFE User Fee Collection Financial Impact

	Number of Policies Impacted	APTC Payment	FFE User Fee Payment	Total
Policies where CMS owes the Issuer APTC	85	\$676,755.08	\$(21,799.60)	\$654,955.48
Policies where the Issuer owes CMS APTC	68	\$(415,199.87)	\$18,834.02	\$(396,365.85)
User Fee Only Policies where CMS owes the Issuer FFE UF	52	N/A	\$5,651.17	\$5,651.17
User Fee Only Policies where the Issuer owes CMS FFE UF	19	N/A	\$(2,364.80)	\$(2,364.80)
Total Impact	224	\$261,555.21	\$320.79	\$261,876.00

Note: Positive values indicate funds owed to the issuer; negative values indicate amounts owed to CMS.

The net financial impact is a payment from CMS to Premera of \$261,876.00, which consists of \$261,555.21 in APTC to be paid to Premera and \$320.79 in FFE user fees to be returned to Premera. The policies impacted and the associated financial impact are detailed in an Excel file provided to Premera in conjunction with the draft report.

The APTC payment and user fee payment adjustments will be processed in the monthly payment cycle and netted against any other payments or charges as indicated by CMS's netting rules.²

² For more information on CMS's payment and collections processes, please visit <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-A/subchapter-B/part-156/subpart-M/section-156.1215>.

IV. SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

An observation is a deviation from APTC and FFE user fee program requirements that is called to the attention of management for purposes of improving compliance in future program years but that does not require correction to payment. While CMS is not adjusting APTC payment or imposing CMPs for observations noted in the audit of the 2017 benefit year, we note issuer deviations from CMS's enrollment regulations or guidance where applicable. As noted in the PPFMG External Audit Communication letter dated July 19, 2019, consistent with the expiration of the good faith policy at 45 CFR § 156.800(c), CMS may begin imposing CMPs for observations identified beginning with benefit year 2020 audits. CMS's audit procedures identified the following three (3) observations:

- Premera provided coverage despite not receiving the binder payment within the issuer's threshold of 90% for one (1) of the five hundred and fifty-five (555) policies reviewed in the Premium Payment Data Extract Validation, which was also a policy reviewed in the Issuer Only Policy Review. The issuer indicated that the "member had coverage from 1/1 - 1/31. Unknown as information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe. The discretionary adjustment was due to issuer error." Pursuant to 45 CFR § 155.400(e), the FFE requires payment of the first month's premium to effectuate an enrollment. Additionally, pursuant to 45 CFR §156.705, issuers offering QHPs in a Federally-facilitated Exchange must make all records available upon request.
- Premera provided coverage despite not receiving the binder payment within the issuer's threshold of 90% within thirty (30) calendar days from the coverage effective date for two (2) of the five hundred and fifty-five (555) policies reviewed in the Premium Payment Data Extract Validations. The issuer indicated the following for the two (2) policies:
 - For one (1) policy with a late binder payment received for month 6, the issuer indicated, "the delay was due to issuer error, 2017 coverage was provided from 6/1 - 12/31 only. Binder payment was received on 7/12 however it is unclear as to the cause for the delay."
 - For one (1) policy with a late payment received for month 1 the issuer indicated, "late payment approved due to issuer error. Unknown as information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe."Pursuant to 45 CFR § 155.400(e), for first month (or binder payment) premiums, premium payment deadlines must be no earlier than the coverage effective date, but no later than thirty (30) calendar days from the coverage effective date. Additionally, pursuant to 45 CFR §156.705, issuers offering QHPs in a Federally-facilitated Exchange must make all records available upon request.
- Premera continued to provide coverage despite not receiving the full outstanding premium balance within the three (3) month grace period for fifteen (15) of the five hundred and fifty-five (555) policies reviewed in Premium Payment Data Extract Validation. The issuer indicated the following for the fifteen (15) policies:
 - For five (5) policies, the issuer indicated, "discretionary adjustment due to issuer error. Write off due to APTC Extended Grace Period Through Date." The issuer further indicated, "information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe."
 - For two (2) policies, the issuer indicated, "posted write-off on [issuer provided dated] due to account reconciliation. Unknown as information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe."

- For three (3) policies, the issuer indicated the payments were late or written off due to issuer error.
- For one (1) policy, the issuer indicated, “enrollment reconciliation and discretionary adjustment was due to issuer error. The write off was due to APTC Extended Grace Period Through Date. 2017 coverage was provided from 1/1 - 7/31. The member did not have coverage between 9/1 - 12/31 or in the month. Regarding issuer errors/discretionary adjustments, unknown as information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe.”
- For one (1) policy, the issuer indicated, “partial write off due to issuer error. Write off due to APTC Extended Grace Period Through Date. Information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe.”
- For one (1) policy, the issuer indicated, “payment posted late due to issuer error.” The issuer further indicated, “appears to have been a number of updates towards the end of 2017 that may have contributed to the late postings. Specific details are unknown as information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe.”
- For one (1) policy, the issuer indicated, “payment posted late due to Sponsor reconciliation. 2017 coverage was provided from 1/1 - 12/31 only. Regarding payment posting late, specific details are unknown as information needed for research could not be retrieved within a reasonable timeframe.”
- For one (1) policy, the issuer indicated, “account appears to have had several HICS cases regarding coverage in the later part of 2017 but it’s unclear with the information available why September, November, & December coverages were written off.”

Pursuant to 45 CFR § 156.270(g), if an enrollee receiving APTC exhausts the three (3) month grace period without paying all outstanding premiums, the QHP issuer must terminate the enrollee's enrollment through the Exchange on the last day of the first month of the three (3) month grace period. Additionally, pursuant to 45 CFR §156.705, issuers offering QHPs in a Federally-facilitated Exchange must make all records available upon request.

Appendix 1 – Issuer Management Response to Net Financial Adjustment

Issuer HIOS ID: 38344

Issuer Name: Premera Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska (Premera)

The undersigned Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) or other authorized official who can legally and financially bind this issuer has reviewed the information included in the audit report of the issuer's 2017 benefit year APTC and FFE user fee program, resulting in a payment to Premera of \$261,876.00, consisting of \$261,555.21 in APTC to be paid to Premera and \$320.79 in FFE user fees to be returned to Premera, and:

(INITIAL) TR Agrees with the audit net adjustment amount above, confirming the audit financial impact and observation(s), if applicable, and as such this report will be considered final and published.

Or

(INITIAL) _____ Disagrees and requests a review of additional information that may impact the audit net adjustment amount resulting from the audit. As you requested a review, CMS will consider this draft only a preliminary audit report. As the review option was selected, you must provide a written explanation with any additional documentation when you return this response within thirty (30) calendar days of the date of this draft audit report. CMS will review the written explanation and any supporting documentation to determine if the report can be amended in a mutually acceptable manner. If you and CMS are unable to come to a mutually acceptable result, your response to this report will be included in the final published audit report.

Signed: Thomas Risse
(Signature of authorized official acting on behalf of the Issuer)

Printed Name: Thomas Risse
(Print name of signature)

Position Title: CFO
(Title of authorized official acting on behalf of the Issuer)

Direct Telephone Number: 425-381-8311

Email Address: Thomas.Risse@premera.com

Date: 6/20/2023