

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are some frequently asked questions received from States regarding the Support of Ombudsman and Beneficiary Counseling Programs for States Participating in the Medicare-Medicaid Financial Alignment Initiative funding opportunity announcement (FOA) CMS-1J1-17-001. This document was last revised on October 18, 2016.

What is the purpose of this Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA)?

This FOA provides states participating in the Medicare-Medicaid Financial Alignment Initiative (FAI) with the opportunity to apply for two years of additional funding for two separate but related programs: demonstration ombudsman programs and one-on-one counseling programs. It is consistent with CMS's commitment to provide ongoing funding for these beneficiary support programs as part of continuation of the FAI. The FOA can be accessed by using the following link: <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html> and search for CFDA 93.634.

What is one-on-one counseling?

One-on-one counseling refers to programs that help beneficiaries and their families in selecting health coverage. Options counseling programs provided by State Health Insurance Programs (SHIPs) or Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) are a common example. However, rather than mandating that states use a combination of their SHIP and ADRC together (as was the case in earlier FOAs), this FOA gives states the flexibility to select the state entity they believe is best suited to provide these services.

Why does the FOA cover funding for both ombudsman programs and one-on-one counseling programs?

CMS wants to encourage greater coordination between one-on-one counseling programs that provide beneficiaries with advice prior to enrollment, and ombudsman programs that assist beneficiaries after enrollment. In addition, under this FOA, states have the option (but are NOT required) to have one agency apply for both programs under a combined application, which creates some greater budgetary flexibility and can simplify grants management for the recipient.

Do states have to apply for both programs?

No. States can apply for either or both programs, as long as they are eligible for the program(s) for which they apply. Different state agencies can apply separately for each program if they wish. Or, if a state wishes, one state agency can apply for both programs in one application. See Section I.6 of the FOA for details.

Is a state that is pursuing both funding opportunities required to use a combined application?

If one state agency administers the ombudsman program and a different agency administers the one-on-one counseling program, then the two agencies may apply separately. They also have the option to submit a combined application with the ombudsman agency as the prime applicant, but a combined application is not required. However, if one state agency administers both programs, then it should submit a combined application.

Which states are eligible to apply?

For one-on-one counseling programs, any FAI state can apply, regardless of whether it applied for funds previously. However, any interested state that has not previously applied for one-on-one counseling funds for FAI should apply in the first round.

For ombudsman programs, only those states that have received funds to support FAI ombudsman programs in the past may apply under this FOA.

When should states apply?

There will be several rounds of applications and awards, as listed in Section II.3 of the FOA. The application deadline for the first round is November 1, 2016. States with previous funding for either ombudsman or one-on-one counseling should plan to apply towards the end of their current grant period. States with current ombudsman program funding should ensure that they apply in time to prevent a lapse in funding.

What changes will be made to quarterly data reporting from what had been previously required under the previous funding opportunity announcements?

Ombudsman grantees will be responsible for two types of reporting: semiannual progress reports and monthly data reports. In order to capture data at a point and time where it would be most relevant, CMS will be changing the reporting frequency for the ombudsman program. The new requirement will ask for a monthly report but will require fewer data categories than previously. Technical assistance will be available to assist grantees with reporting.

The quarterly data reporting requirements for the one-on-one counseling program will remain the same.

How much funding is available to each grantee?

Through the funding opportunity announcement, CMS is making \$17,800,000 available to support ombudsman and one-on-one counseling services. Specific funding amounts for each state will be based on the number of people eligible for the financial alignment model demonstration and geographic considerations. Ombudsman grantees should expect to receive a similar level of funding than was awarded through the previous funding opportunity announcement. The funding would be for a two year project period rather than a three year project period as in the initial FOA.

Applicants to the one-on-one counseling program should use the table below that was provided in the 2014 FOA as a guide.

Estimated Number of Beneficiaries Eligible for Demonstration	Minimum Award Amount	Maximum Award Amount
Up to 60,000 eligible beneficiaries	\$47,000	\$521,000
60,000 to 95,000 eligible beneficiaries	\$240,000	\$630,000
95,000 to 140,000 eligible beneficiaries	\$360,000	\$900,000
140,000 to 175,000 eligible beneficiaries	\$500,000	\$920,000
more than 200,000 eligible beneficiaries	\$600,000	\$1,000,000

Applicants that submit a combined application will have some flexibility on how to distribute funding between both activities.