

Electronic File Interchange (EFI)

March 2006



All health care providers must begin using their National Provider Identifiers (NPIs) in Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 standard transactions by May 23, 2007. Health care providers can apply for NPIs in one of three ways:

- By using the web-based National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES);
- By filling out a paper NPI application/Update form and mailing it to the NPI Enumerator, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) contractor responsible for processing NPI applications; or
- By having their NPI application information, along with the application information for many other health care providers, submitted to NPPES through the Electronic File Interchange (EFI) by an organization on their behalf.

What Is EFI?

The EFI process allows CMS-approved organizations to submit NPI application information on behalf of health care providers who are associated with them and who have agreed to have these organizations submit this information for them. Once they are approved by CMS, these organizations will be known as Electronic File Interchange Organizations (EFIOs). The EFI process for “bulk enumeration” of health care providers will allow each EFIO to submit NPI application information for hundreds or even thousands of health care providers all at one time in a single electronic file or in a series of electronic files. The health care providers would not need to apply for their NPIs themselves. CMS expects EFI to be operational in late spring 2006.

How Is EFI Helpful?

EFI benefits both the health care providers and CMS. By allowing an EFIO to apply on its behalf, a health care provider itself need not have to apply for an NPI. This saves the health care provider time and resources. CMS also benefits by saving the time and resources it would have had to expend if the NPI Enumerator and the web-based system had to process NPI applications from all of these health care providers one at a time.

In addition to obtaining NPIs for health care providers, some EFIOs may also decide to send changes or updates to the NPPES on behalf of enumerated health care providers in order to keep these providers' NPPES records current. Again, the EFIO would need to obtain the permission of the health care providers in order to do this. Whether or not to furnish changes or updates to a health care provider's NPPES record is a decision that would be made between an EFIO and its associated health care providers.

How Does EFI Work?

For details on how the EFI process works, you should visit CMS' NPI web page at www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalProviderStand/07_efi.asp and read the following documents:

- The EFI Summary, which contains a general overview of the EFI process.
- The EFI User Manual and the EFI Technical Companion Guide. These documents contain information on the appropriate file format and schema, screen prints, etc. Potential EFIOs must fully understand the content of these documents in order to be successful with the EFI process.

Resources for Additional Information

To register as an EFIO, an organization's representative must log onto <https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov> and follow the appropriate links to the EFIO registration page.

If an EFIO has questions about the process or experiences problems during the process, and is unable to find the answer in the EFI information available from the CMS NPI web page, the EFIO can contact the NPI Enumerator at 1-800-465-3203 (NPI Toll-Free), 1-800-692-2326 (NPI TTY), or customerservice@npienumerator.com.

A CMS web page dedicated to providing all the latest NPI news is available at www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalProvIdentStand/ on the CMS website. This page also contains a section for Medicare Fee-For-Service (FFS) providers with helpful information on the Medicare NPI implementation.

The Medicare Learning Network (MLN) is the brand name for official CMS educational products and information for Medicare providers. For additional information visit the Medicare Learning Network's web page at www.cms.hhs.gov/medlearn on the CMS website.

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