

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, Maryland 21244-1850



CENTER FOR BENEFICIARY CHOICES

DATE: September 10, 2007

TO: All MA, MA-PD, and Part D Plan Sponsors

FROM: Cynthia Tudor, Ph.D., Director, Medicare Drug Benefit Group
David Lewis, Director, Medicare Advantage Group

SUBJECT: Coordinating with State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) Counselors

Over the last year, State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) counselors have been invaluable in assisting Medicare beneficiaries with enrollment or other issues. We have been working to implement measures to improve the ability of SHIP counselors to provide assistance to Medicare beneficiaries. CMS' Division of SHIP Relations has developed a *UniqueID* system for SHIP Directors. The system allows SHIP counselors to obtain information from Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) at 1-800-MEDICARE that may be necessary to assist beneficiaries with claims-related issues and concerns.

In this process, SHIP Program Directors assign a *UniqueID* only to SHIP counselors who have been trained on privacy policies and procedures and have signed a client confidentiality and privacy statement to which they have agreed and understand that they are accountable for the protection of a beneficiary's personal information. The counselors use that *UniqueID* to identify themselves when they call 1-800-MEDICARE to authenticate their status as a SHIP counselor. These signed statements are kept on file in the SHIP program office.

CMS strongly encourages Medicare Advantage and Part D sponsors to implement a similar process whereby their CSR would offer expedited customer service to SHIP counselors who present a *UniqueID*. Under this process:

1. CMS will provide access to an HPMS file of *UniqueIDs*. The file will be available in HPMS in mid-October. The CSRs should be able to easily search the database since the *UniqueID* is a 7-character access code (example: CT99999 may represent John Doe from the Connecticut for Senior Program in Connecticut). The first 2 positions of this code are alpha characters that denote the United States Postal Service recognized two-letter State abbreviation. The remaining 5 characters are numeric and are automatically generated by a CMS contracted source. This feature allows the search of a specific counselor in order to verify the required information since the database is alphabetically organized by state abbreviation.

2. When a SHIP counselor contacts the Part D sponsors' call center, the call center should be instructed to disclose information to a SHIP director/counselor when the following conditions are met:
 - a. The SHIP counselor has written or verbal authorization from a beneficiary or their representative to discuss a beneficiary's plan issues or concerns; **and**,
 - b. The counselor is listed on a national SHIP roster of *UniqueIDs** issued by CMS.

If both section 2a and 2b above are met, the CSR will ask questions to verify the identity of the beneficiary, i.e., full name, DOB, Medicare number, and one additional piece of information. e.g., address, phone number, effective date(s) of Medicare A and/or B. The CSR will also ask questions to verify the identity of the SHIP counselor, i.e., her/his full name, state program name of the SHIP, State from which they are calling, etc.

If both section 2a or 2b above are **not** met, the Part D Sponsor call center CSRs should be instructed **NOT** to disclose any information pertaining to a Medicare beneficiary to a SHIP counselor.

NOTE: This process does NOT replace nor supercede those situations where a Medicare beneficiary 1) is sitting in the SHIP office with a counselor and is able to speak to the CSR to verify disclosure authorization, or 2) calls the SHIP and the counselor, in turn, brings the CSR into the call and the CSR confirms authorization while on that 3-way call. .

One of the safety measures pertaining to the *UniqueID* includes, for retiring counselors, the immediate removal of their counselor ID and contact information from the database of SHIP counselors. Consequently, deletions to the database will be conducted periodically by CMS. Updates to the database will be made monthly.

Medicare Advantage and Part D sponsors may also choose to establish dedicated SHIP phone lines for use by SHIP Program Directors or their designees to present high-level issues, such as feedback on plan policy and plan operations. This model could be enhanced by using the State designation in the unique identifier code to route calls to specific contacts best equipped to address issues from that State.

If you choose to utilize the UniqueID system to enhance the ability of SHIPs to resolve beneficiary concerns and/or if you choose to establish a dedicated SHIP phone line, please send an email to ship@cms.hhs.gov. CMS will maintain a list of participating plans for SHIP counselors to reference.

If you have any questions about any of the issues in this memorandum, please contact your Medicare Advantage plan manager or Part D account manager.