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Employers who sponsor a group health plan with prescription drug benefits are required to notify their Medicare-eligible participants and beneficiaries as to whether the drug coverage provided under the plan is “creditable” or “non-creditable.” This notification must be provided **prior to October 15th each year.**

Below you will find detailed information regarding these requirements.

Background

Medicare Part D, the Medicare prescription drug program, imposes a higher premium on beneficiaries who delay enrollment in Part D after initial eligibility unless they have employer-provided coverage that is creditable (meaning equal to or better than coverage provided under Part D).

Employers that provide prescription drug benefits are required to notify Medicare-eligible individuals annually as to whether the employer-provided benefit is creditable or non-creditable so that these individuals can decide whether or not to delay Part D enrollment.

Notice to Participants

CMS has issued participant disclosure model notices for both creditable and non-creditable coverage, which can be found at:

<http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Prescription-Drug-Coverage/CreditableCoverage/Model-Notice-Letters.html>
(notices were last updated by CMS for use on or after April 1, 2011).

Spanish notices are also provided at the above link.

Who must receive the Participant Notice?

Notice should be sent to all Part D-eligible participants. This includes active employees, COBRA qualified beneficiaries, retirees, spouses, and other dependents of the employee covered by the plan. In many cases, the employer will not know whether an individual is Medicare eligible or not. Therefore, employers may wish to provide the notice to all plan participants (including COBRA qualified beneficiaries) to ensure compliance with the notification requirements.

When Should the Participant Notice be Sent?

Participant disclosure notices should be sent at the following times:

- Prior to **October 15th** each year;
- Prior to an individual's Initial Enrollment Period for Part D;
- Prior to the effective date of coverage for any Medicare eligible individual under the plan;
- Whenever prescription drug coverage ends or changes so that it is no longer creditable or it becomes creditable; and
- Upon a beneficiary's request.

If the disclosure notice is provided to all plan participants annually, prior to the October 15th, CMS will consider the first two bullet points satisfied. Many employers provide the notice either during or immediately following the annual group plan enrollment period.

In order to satisfy the third bullet point, employers should provide the participant notice to new hires and newly eligible individuals under the group health plan.

How Should the Participant Notice be Sent?

The employer may provide a single disclosure notice to a participant and his or her family members covered under the plan. However, the employer is required to provide a separate disclosure notice if it is known that a spouse or dependent resides at an address different from the address where the participant's materials were provided.

Mail

Mail is the recommended method of delivery, and the method CMS initially had in mind when issuing its guidance.

Electronic Delivery

The employer may provide the notice electronically to plan participants who have the ability to access the employer's electronic information system on a daily basis as part of their work duties (consistent with the DOL electronic delivery requirements 29 CFR § 2520.104b-4(c)(1)).



If this electronic method of disclosure is chosen, the plan sponsor must inform the plan participant that the participant is responsible for providing a copy of the electronic disclosure to their Medicare eligible dependents covered under the group health plan.

In addition to having the disclosure notice sent electronically, the notice must be posted on the entity's Web site, if applicable, with a link to the creditable coverage disclosure notice.

Sending notices electronically will not always work for COBRA qualified beneficiaries who may not have access to the employer's electronic information system on a daily basis. Mail is generally the recommended method of delivery in such instances.

Open Enrollment Materials

If an employer chooses to incorporate the Part D disclosure with other plan participant information, the disclosure must be prominent and conspicuous. This means that the disclosure portion of the document (or a reference to the section in the document being provided to the individual that contains the required statement) must be prominently referenced in at least 14-point font in a separate box, bolded or offset on the first page of the provided information.

CMS provides sample language for referencing the creditable or non-creditable coverage status of the plan per the requirements:

If you (and/or your dependents) have Medicare or will become eligible for Medicare in the next 12 months, a Federal law gives you more choices about your prescription drug coverage.

Please see page xx for more details.

How is Creditable Coverage Determined?

Most insurance carriers and TPAs will disclose whether or not the prescription drug coverage under the plan is creditable for purposes of Medicare Part D.

CMS's guidance provides two ways to make this determination, actuarially or through a simplified determination.

Actuarial Determination


Prescription drug coverage is creditable if the actuarial value of the coverage equals or exceeds the actuarial value of standard Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage. In general this is determined by measuring whether the expected amount of paid claims under the employer's drug program is at least as much as what is expected under the standard Part D program. This can be determined through an actuarial equivalency test, which generally requires the hiring of an actuary to perform.

Simplified Determination

Most entities will be permitted to use the simplified determination of creditable coverage status to annually determine whether coverage is creditable or not.

A prescription drug plan is deemed to be creditable if:

- It provides coverage for brand and generic prescriptions;
- It provides reasonable access to retail providers;
- The plan is designed to pay on average at least 60% of participants' prescription drug expenses; and
- It satisfies at least one of the following:
 - The prescription drug coverage has no annual benefit maximum benefit or a maximum annual benefit payable by the plan of at least \$25,000;
 - The prescription drug coverage has an actuarial expectation that the amount payable by the plan will be at least \$2,000 annually per Medicare eligible individual; or
 - For entities that have integrated health coverage, the integrated health plan has no more than a \$250 deductible per year, has no annual benefit maximum or a maximum annual benefit payable by the plan of at least \$25,000, and has no less than a \$1,000,000 lifetime combined benefit maximum.



An integrated plan is any plan of benefits where the prescription drug benefit is combined with other coverage offered by the entity (i.e., medical, dental, vision, etc.) and the plan has all of the following plan provisions:

- a combined plan year deductible for all benefits under the plan,
- a combined annual benefit maximum for all benefits under the plan, and/or
- a combined lifetime benefit maximum for all benefits under the plan.