

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services



In September 2012, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced the availability of a new electronic mailing list for those who refer Medicare beneficiaries for Durable Medical Equipment, Prosthetics, Orthotics, and Supplies (DMEPOS). Referral agents play a critical role in providing information and services to Medicare beneficiaries. To ensure you give Medicare patients the most current DMEPOS Competitive Bidding Program information, CMS strongly encourages you to review the information sent from this new electronic mailing list. In addition, please share the information you receive from the mailing list and the link to the ["mailing list for referral agents"](#) subscriber webpage with others who refer Medicare beneficiaries for DMEPOS. Thank you for signing up!

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## **HIPAA Eligibility Transaction System (HETS) to Replace Common Working File (CWF) Medicare Beneficiary Health Insurance Eligibility Queries**

**Note:** This article was revised on February 10, 2014, to update certain language to reflect the current **status of this change** (see **bolded language on page 2**). Also, clarifications have been made to the last question in the Frequently Asked Questions section on page 3. All other information is unchanged.

### **Provider Types Affected**

This MLN Matters® Special Edition Article is intended for health care providers, suppliers and their billing agents, software vendors and clearinghouses that use Medicare's Common Working File (CWF) queries to obtain their patient's Medicare health insurance eligibility information from Medicare contractors (carriers, Fiscal Intermediaries (FIs), Regional Home Health Intermediaries (RHHIs), Durable Medical Equipment Medicare Administrative Contractors (DME MACs), and/or Part A/B Medicare Administrative Contractors (A/B MACs)).

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## Provider Action Needed

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If you currently use CWF queries to obtain Medicare health insurance eligibility information for Medicare fee-for service patients, you should immediately begin transitioning to the Medicare Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Eligibility Transaction System (HETS).

## What You Need to Know

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This article describes upcoming changes to Medicare beneficiary health insurance eligibility inquiry services that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) will implement in the coming months. In April 2013, access to CWF eligibility query functions implemented in the Multi-Carrier System (MCS) and ViPS Medicare System (VMS), also referred to as PPTN and VPIQ, was terminated. CMS intends to terminate access to the other CWF eligibility queries implemented in the Fiscal Intermediary Standard System (FISS) Direct Data Entry (DDE), often referred to the HIQA, HIQH, ELGA and ELGH screens and HUQA. **Change Request 8248 creates the ability for CMS to terminate these queries. While termination was originally scheduled for April 2014, CMS is delaying the date. CMS will provide at least 90 days advanced notice of the new termination date.** This **will not** affect the use of DDE to submit claims or to correct claims and will not impact access to beneficiary eligibility information from Medicare Contractor's Interactive Voice Response (IVR) units and/or Internet portals.

## Background

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In 2005, CMS began offering HETS in a real-time environment to Medicare health care providers, suppliers and their billing agents, software vendors and clearinghouses. HETS is Medicare's Health Care Eligibility Benefit Inquiry and Response electronic transaction, ASCX12 270/271 Version 5010, adopted under HIPAA. HETS replaces the CWF queries, and is to be used for the business of Medicare; such as preparing an accurate Medicare claim or determining eligibility for specific services.

## Key Points

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### *General Information*

CMS plans to discontinue access to the CWF queries through the shared systems. Medicare providers and their agents that currently access the CWF queries through the shared system screens will need to modify their business processes to use HETS to access Medicare beneficiary eligibility information.

### *HETS*

HETS allows Medicare providers and their agents to submit and receive X12N 270/271 eligibility request and response files over a secure connection. Many Medicare providers and their agents are already receiving eligibility information from HETS. For more information about HETS and how to obtain access to the system, refer to the CMS HETS Help web page at

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<http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/CMS-Information-Technology/HETSHelp/HowtoGetConnectedHETS270271.html> on the CMS website.

## Frequently Asked Questions

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**Are Medicare providers that currently use CWF to obtain beneficiary eligibility information required to switch to HETS?**

No, but it is recommended. Providers may also choose to use a Medicare Contractor's IVR or Internet portal.

**What are the minimum data elements required in order to complete an eligibility search in HETS?**

HETS applies search logic that uses a combination of four data elements: Health Insurance Claim Number (HICN), Medicare Beneficiary's Date of Birth, Medicare Beneficiary's Full Last Name (including Suffix, if applicable), and Medicare Beneficiary's Full First Name. The Date of Birth and First Name are optional, but at least one must be present.

**Does HETS return the same eligibility information that is currently provided by the CWF eligibility queries?**

Changes are currently underway in HETS to return psychiatric information to authorized providers and to return Hospice period information in the same format as CWF. When these changes are made, HETS will return all of the information provided by the CWF eligibility queries that is needed to process Medicare claims. These changes will be in place before the termination date for the FISS DDE CWF query access.

HETS returns additional information that CWF does not return. For example, HETS returns:

- Part D plan number, address and enrollment dates; and.
- Medicare Advantage Organization name, address, website and phone number.

The HETS 270/271 Companion Guide provides specific details about the eligibility information that is returned in the HETS 271 response. The guide is available at <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/CMS-Information-Technology/HETSHelp/Downloads/HETS270271CompanionGuide5010.pdf> on the CMS website.

## Additional Information

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If you use a software vendor or clearinghouse to access Medicare beneficiary health insurance eligibility information, you should direct questions to your vendor or clearinghouse. If you have any questions about HETS, please contact the MCARE Help Desk at 1-866-324-7315.

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