Critical Access Hospital

RURAL HEALTH FACT SHEET SERIES

Please note: The information in this publication applies only to the Medicare Fee-For-Service Program (also known as Original Medicare).

This publication provides the following information about Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs):

- Background;
- CAH designation;
- CAH payments (including hospital inpatient admission certification requirements);
- Additional Medicare payments;
- Grants to States under the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program (Flex Program);
- Resources; and
- Lists of helpful websites and Regional Office Rural Health Coordinators.

When “you” is used in this publication, we are referring to Medicare Fee-For-Service health care providers.

BACKGROUND

Legislation enacted as part of the Balanced Budget Act (BBA) of 1997 authorized States to establish a State Flex Program under which certain facilities participating in Medicare can become CAHs.

The following providers may be eligible to become CAHs:

- Currently participating Medicare hospitals;
- Hospitals that ceased operation after November 29, 1989; or
- Health clinics or centers (as defined by the State) that previously operated as a hospital before being downsized to a health clinic or center.

Unlike facilities such as Medicare Dependent Hospitals and Sole Community Hospitals, CAHs represent a separate provider type with their own Medicare Conditions of Participation (CoP) as well as a separate payment method. The CoPs for CAHs are listed in the “Code of Federal Regulations” (CFR) at 42 CFR 485.601–647.

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For more information about CAHs and CAH payment rules, refer to Sections 1814(a)(8), 1814(l), 1820, 1834(g), 1834(l)(8), 1883(a)(3), and 1861(v)(1)(A) of the Social Security Act (the Act) and 42 CFR 410.152(k), 412.3, 424.15, 413.70, and 413.114(a).

CAH DESIGNATION

A hospital that already participates in Medicare and seeks CAH status must meet the following criteria to be certified and remain certified as a CAH:

- Be located in a State that established a State rural health plan for the State Flex Program (as of September 2011, only Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Rhode Island did not have a State Flex Program);
- Be located in a rural area or be treated as rural under a special provision that allows qualified hospital providers in urban areas to be treated as rural;
- Demonstrate compliance with the CoPs found at 42 CFR Part 485 subpart F at the time of application for CAH certification;
- Furnish 24-hour emergency care services 7 days a week, using either on-site or on-call staff, with specific on-site response timeframes for on-call staff;
- Maintain no more than 25 inpatient beds that may also be used for swing bed services. It may also operate a distinct part rehabilitation and/or psychiatric unit, each with up to 10 beds;
- Have an annual average length of stay of 96 hours or less per patient for acute care (excluding swing bed services and beds that are within distinct part units). This requirement cannot be assessed on initial certification but applies subsequent to CAH certification. (Note that payment rules require a physician to certify that an individual may reasonably be expected to be discharged or transferred to a hospital within 96 hours after admission to the CAH); and

- Be:
  - Located more than a 35-mile drive from any hospital or other CAH; or
  - Located more than a 15-mile drive from any hospital or other CAH in an area with mountainous terrain or only secondary roads; OR
  - Certified as a CAH prior to January 1, 2006, based on State designation as a “necessary provider” of health care services to residents in the area.

Effective October 1, 2014, under new Office of Management and Budget (OMB) delineations, some CAHs previously located in rural areas may now be located in urban areas. A 2-year transition period is provided, effective October 1, 2014, through September 30, 2016, for affected CAHs to seek rural classification under 42 CFR 412.103 to retain their CAH status after the 2-year transition period ends. This policy to provide for a 2-year transition period also applies to future changes in OMB delineations.

CAH PAYMENTS

CAHs are paid for most inpatient and outpatient services to Medicare patients at 101 percent of reasonable costs.

CAHs are not subject to the Inpatient Prospective Payment System (IPPS) or the Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS).

CAH services are subject to Medicare Part A and Part B deductible and coinsurance amounts. The copayment amount for most outpatient CAH services is 20 percent of applicable Part B charges and is not limited by the Part A inpatient deductible amount.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) encourages CAHs to engage in consumer-friendly communication with patients about their charges to help patients understand their potential financial liability for services they may obtain at the CAH.

Inpatient Admissions

To receive payment under Part A, a reasonable and necessary hospital inpatient admission must include a physician certification that includes the items listed below. Beginning October 1, 2014, the CAH must complete all certification requirements no later than 1 day prior to when it submits the claim for payment for the inpatient CAH service. Physician certification must include:

- An order in which the physician reasonably expects the patient to require a stay that crosses 2 midnights and involves medically necessary inpatient services;
- The reason for inpatient services;
Estimated time the patient will require in the hospital; 
Plans for post-hospital care, if appropriate; and 
Certification that the patient may reasonably be expected to be discharged or transferred to a hospital within 96 hours after admission to the CAH. This certification requirement can be combined with other certification requirements or submitted separately. Because this statutory certification requirement is based on an expectation that if a physician certifies in good faith that an individual may reasonably be expected to be discharged or transferred to a hospital within 96 hours after admission to the CAH and then something unforeseen occurs causing the individual to stay longer at the CAH, Medicare will pay for the costs of treating that patient. A problem will not occur regarding the CAH designation as long as that individual’s stay does not cause the CAH to exceed its 96-hour annual average CoP requirement. However, if a physician cannot in good faith certify that an individual may reasonably be expected to be discharged or transferred to a hospital within 96 hours after admission to the CAH, the CAH will not receive Medicare Part A payment for any portion of that individual’s inpatient stay. The following are not included in applying the 96-hour certification requirement:

• Time as an outpatient at the CAH; and
• Time in a CAH swing bed being used to provide skilled nursing services.

The clock for the 96-hour certification requirement only begins once the individual is admitted to the CAH as an inpatient.

Ambulance Transports

A CAH can be paid for its ambulance transports or for the ambulance transports provided by a CAH-owned and operated entity, based on 101 percent of reasonable costs, if the CAH is the only provider or supplier of ambulance transports located within a 35-mile drive of the CAH; and

If there is no other provider or supplier of ambulance transports within a 35-mile drive of the CAH and the CAH owns and operates an entity furnishing ambulance transports that is more than a 35-mile drive from the CAH, the CAH can be paid based on 101 percent of the reasonable costs of that entity’s ambulance transports as long as that entity is the closest provider or supplier of ambulance transports to the CAH.

Reasonable Cost Payment Principles That Do NOT Apply to CAHs

Payment for inpatient or outpatient CAH services is not subject to the following reasonable cost principles:

• Lesser of cost or charges; and
• Reasonable compensation equivalent limits.

In addition, in general, payments to a CAH for inpatient CAH services are not subject to ceilings on hospital inpatient operating costs or the 1-day or 3-day preadmission payment window provisions applicable to hospitals paid under the IPPS and OPPS. However, if a patient receives outpatient services at a CAH that is wholly owned or operated by an IPPS hospital and is admitted as an inpatient to that IPPS hospital, either on the same day or within 3 days immediately following the day of those outpatient services, the outpatient services are subject to payment window provisions.

Outpatient Services: Standard Payment Method (Method I) or Election of Optional Payment Method (Method II)

Standard Payment Method – Reasonable Cost-Based Facility Services, With Billing Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) for Professional Services

Under Section 1834(g)(1) of the Act, a CAH is paid under the Standard Payment Method unless it elects to be paid under the Optional Payment Method. For cost reporting periods beginning on or after January 1, 2004, under the Standard Payment Method, payments for outpatient CAH facility services are made at 101 percent of reasonable costs.
Payment for professional medical services furnished in a CAH to registered CAH outpatients is made by the MAC under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (PFS), as is the case when such professional services are furnished in a hospital outpatient department. For purposes of CAH payment, professional medical services are defined as services furnished by a physician or other qualified practitioner.

Optional Payment Method – Reasonable Cost-Based Facility Services Plus 115 Percent Fee Schedule Payment for Professional Services

Under Section 1834(g)(2) of the Act, a CAH may elect the Optional Payment Method, under which it bills the MAC for both facility services and professional services furnished to its outpatients by a physician or practitioner who has reassigned his or her billing rights to the CAH. However, even if a CAH makes this election, each physician or practitioner who furnishes professional services to CAH outpatients can choose to either:

- Reassign his or her billing rights to the CAH, agree to be included under the Optional Payment Method, attest in writing that he or she will not bill the MAC for professional services furnished in the CAH outpatient department, and look to the CAH for payment for the professional services; or
- File claims for his or her professional services with the MAC for standard payment under the Medicare PFS.

For each physician or practitioner who agrees to be included under the Optional Payment Method and reassigned benefits accordingly, the CAH must forward a copy of a completed Form CMS-855R/Medicare Enrollment Application for Reassignment of Medicare Benefits to the MAC and keep the original on file. This attestation will remain at the CAH.

Once the Optional Payment Method is elected, it will remain in effect until the CAH submits a termination request to the MAC. A CAH is no longer required to make an annual election to be paid under the Optional Payment Method in a subsequent year. If a CAH elects to terminate its Optional Payment Method, the termination request must be submitted in writing to the MAC at least 30 days prior to the start of the next cost reporting period.

The Optional Payment Method election applies to all CAH professional services furnished in the CAH outpatient department by physicians and practitioners who:

- Agree to be included under the Optional Payment Method by reassigning their billing rights to the CAH;
- Complete Form CMS-855R; and
- Attest in writing that they will not bill the MAC for their outpatient professional services.


As of January 1, 2004, payment for outpatient CAH services under the Optional Payment Method is based on the sum of:

- For facility services – 101 percent of reasonable costs, after applicable deductions, regardless of whether the physician or practitioner reassigned his or her billing rights to the CAH;
- For physician professional services – 115 percent of the allowable amount, after applicable deductions, under the Medicare PFS; and
- For non-physician practitioner professional services – 115 percent of the amount that otherwise would be paid for the practitioner’s professional services, after applicable deductions, under the Medicare PFS.

Payment for Telehealth Services

Effective January 1, 2007, the payment amount is 80 percent of the Medicare PFS for telehealth services when the distant site physician or other practitioner is located in a CAH that elected the Optional Payment Method and the physician or practitioner reassigned his or her benefits to the CAH.
Payment for Teaching Anesthesiologist Services

Effective January 1, 2010, for a teaching anesthesiologist who has reassigned billing rights to the CAH, payment for outpatient CAH services under the Optional Payment Method is based on 115 percent of the Medicare PFS if he or she is involved in:

- The training of a resident in a single anesthesia case;
- Two concurrent anesthesia cases involving residents; or
- A single anesthesia case involving a resident that is concurrent to another case paid under the medically directed rate.

The following requirements must be met to qualify for payment:

- The teaching anesthesiologist or different anesthesiologist(s) in the same anesthesia group must be present during all critical or key portions of the anesthesia service or procedure; and
- The teaching anesthesiologist or another anesthesiologist with whom he or she has entered into an arrangement must be immediately available to provide anesthesia services during the entire procedure.

The patient’s medical record must document:

- The teaching anesthesiologist’s presence during all critical or key portions of the anesthesia procedure; and
- The immediate availability of another teaching anesthesiologist as necessary.

When different teaching anesthesiologists are present with the resident during the critical or key portions of the procedure, report the National Provider Identifier of the teaching anesthesiologist who started the case on the claim.

Submit teaching anesthesiologist claims using the following modifiers:

- AA – Anesthesia services performed personally by anesthesiologist; and
- GC – This service has been performed in part by a resident under the direction of a teaching physician.

ADDITIONAL MEDICARE PAYMENTS

Residents in Approved Medical Residency Training Programs Who Train at a CAH

For cost reporting periods beginning on or after October 1, 2013, Medicare payments are made to CAHs for training full-time equivalent (FTE) residents in approved residency training programs at the CAH. That is, a hospital can no longer claim residency training time at a CAH for purposes of the hospital’s direct graduate medical education and/or indirect medical education FTE resident count. If a CAH incurs the cost of training FTE residents for the time the residents rotate to the CAH, the CAH may receive payment based on 101 percent of reasonable costs for the costs it incurs in training those residents.

Medicare Rural Pass-Through Funding for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) Services

CAHs may receive reasonable cost-based funding for certain CRNA services as an incentive to continue to serve the Medicare population in rural areas. The regulations at 42 CFR 412.113(c) list the specific requirements hospitals and CAHs must fulfill to receive rural pass-through funding from Medicare for certain CRNA services furnished by CRNAs whom they employ or contract with to furnish such services to CAH patients.

CAHs that qualify for CRNA pass-through payments can receive reasonable cost-based payments for inpatient and outpatient CRNA professional services regardless of whether they are paid using the Standard Payment Method or the Optional Payment Method for outpatient services. However, if a CAH opts to include a CRNA in its Optional Payment Method election, the services furnished by that CRNA are paid based on the Medicare PFS and the CAH gives up inpatient and outpatient CRNA pass-through payments for services furnished by that CRNA.

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Incentive Payments

Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) Incentive Bonus Payment

Physicians (including psychiatrists) who furnish care in a CAH that is located within a geographic-based, primary care HPSA and psychiatrists who furnish care in a CAH that is located in a geographic-based mental health HPSA are eligible for a 10 percent HPSA bonus payment for outpatient professional services furnished to a Medicare patient. If you have reassigned your billing rights and the CAH has elected the Optional Payment Method, the CAH will receive 115 percent of the otherwise applicable Medicare PFS amount multiplied by 110 percent, based on all claims processed during the quarter.

When you furnish services to Medicare patients in a ZIP code on the list of ZIP codes eligible for automatic HPSA bonus payment, the HPSA physician bonus payment is made automatically. This list is updated annually and is effective for services furnished on and after January 1 of each calendar year.

If you furnish services to Medicare patients in a geographic HPSA that is not on the list of ZIP codes eligible for automatic payment, you must use the AQ modifier, “Physician providing a service in an unlisted Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA),” on the claim to receive the bonus payment. Services submitted with the AQ modifier are subject to validation by Medicare. You must ensure that the modifier is used only for services provided to a Medicare patient in an area designated as a geographic primary care HPSA (or a mental health geographic HPSA for psychiatrists) as of December 31 of the prior year.

An area may be eligible for the HPSA bonus payment but the ZIP code may not be on the list because:

1. It does not fall entirely within a designated full county HPSA bonus area;
2. It is not considered to fall within the county based on a determination of dominance made by the United States (U.S.) Postal Service;
3. It is partially within a non-full county HPSA; or
4. Services are provided in a ZIP code area that was not included in the automated file of HPSA areas based on the date of the data used to create the file.

For ZIP codes that are not on the automated payment list, visit the following web pages for assistance in determining whether an area is in a geographic-based primary care or mental health HPSA:

- The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Geospatial Warehouse at [http://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov](http://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov) on the HRSA website;
- The American FactFinder at [http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml) on the U.S. Census Bureau website; and

HPSA Surgical Incentive Payment Program (HSIP)

Under the Affordable Care Act, effective for services furnished on and after January 1, 2011, general surgeons who furnish a 10- or 90-day global surgical procedure in a ZIP code located in a HPSA are eligible for a 10 percent HPSA bonus payment and a 10 percent HSIP.

Primary Care Incentive Payment (PCIP)

Under the Affordable Care Act, effective for services furnished on and after January 1, 2011, the following physician and non-physician specialties are potentially eligible for a PCIP of 10 percent of paid charges for Medicare Part B primary care services furnished to patients:

- Family, internal, geriatric, and pediatric medicine physicians;
- Clinical nurse specialists;
- Nurse practitioners; and
- Physician assistants.
Only those practitioners enrolled in Medicare with one of the specialties listed above and whose primary care services accounted for at least 60 percent of their paid charges under the Medicare PFS (excluding hospital inpatient care and emergency department visits) during the designated period are eligible for the PCIP. Eligibility for the PCIP is determined on an annual basis.

The PCIP is paid on a quarterly basis and is in addition to other applicable physician incentive payments.

The chart below lists the primary care services that are eligible for the PCIP.

### Primary Care Services Eligible for the PCIP

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New and Established Patient Office or Other Outpatient Visits</td>
<td>CPT codes 99201–99215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Facility Care Visits and Domiciliary, Rest Home, or Home Care Plan Oversight Services</td>
<td>CPT codes 99304–99340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient Home Visits</td>
<td>CPT codes 99341–99350</td>
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</tbody>
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**GRANTS TO STATES UNDER THE MEDICARE RURAL HOSPITAL FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM (FLEX PROGRAM)**

The Flex Program, which was authorized by Section 4201 of the BBA (Public Law 105-33), consists of two separate but complementary components:

- A Medicare reimbursement program that provides reasonable cost-based reimbursement for Medicare-certified CAHs, which is administered by CMS; and
- A State grant program that supports the development of community-based rural organized systems of care in participating States, which is administered by HRSA through the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy.

To receive funds under the grant program, States must apply for the funds and engage in rural health planning through the development and maintenance of a State Rural Health Plan that:

- Designates and supports the conversions to CAHs;
- Promotes emergency medical services (EMS) integration initiatives by linking local EMS with CAHs and their network partners;
- Develops rural health networks to assist and support CAHs;
- Develops and supports quality improvement initiatives; and
- Evaluates State programs within the framework of national program goals.
## RESOURCES

The chart below provides CAH resource information.

### CAH Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For More Information About…</th>
<th>Resource</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office of Management and Budget Metropolitan Statistical Areas</td>
<td><a href="http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg_statpolicy/#ms">http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg_statpolicy/#ms</a> on the OMB website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Professional Shortage Areas</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/HPSAPSAPhysicianBonuses">http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/HPSAPSAPhysicianBonuses</a> on the CMS website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swing Bed Requirements for Critical Access Hospitals</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/SNFPPS/SwingBed.html">http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/SNFPPS/SwingBed.html</a> on the CMS website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare Information for Patients</td>
<td><a href="http://www.medicare.gov">http://www.medicare.gov</a> on the CMS website</td>
</tr>
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</table>
**HELPFUL WEBSITES**

American Hospital Association Rural Health Care  
http://www.aha.org/advocacy-issues/rural

Critical Access Hospitals Center  
http://www.cms.gov/Center/Provider-Type/Critical-Access-Hospitals-Center.html

Disproportionate Share Hospital  
http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/AcuteInpatientPPS/dsh.html

Federally Qualified Health Centers Center  
http://www.cms.gov/Center/Provider-Type/Federally-Qualified-Health-Centers-FQHC-Center.html

Health Resources and Services Administration  
http://www.hrsa.gov

Hospital Center  
http://www.cms.gov/Center/Provider-Type/Hospital-Center.html

Medicare Learning Network®  
http://go.cms.gov/MLNGenInfo

National Association of Community Health Centers  
http://www.nachc.org

National Association of Rural Health Clinics  
http://narhc.org

National Rural Health Association  
http://www.ruralhealthweb.org

Rural Assistance Center  
http://www.raconline.org

Rural Health Clinics Center  
http://www.cms.gov/Center/Provider-Type/Rural-Health-Clinics-Center.html

Swing Bed Providers  
http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/SNFPPS/SwingBed.html

Telehealth  
http://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-General-Information/Telehealth

U.S. Census Bureau  
http://www.census.gov

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**REGIONAL OFFICE RURAL HEALTH COORDINATORS**

Below is a list of contact information for CMS Regional Office Rural Health Coordinators who provide technical, policy, and operational assistance on rural health issues.

**Region I – Boston**  
Rick Hoover  
Email: rick.hoover@cms.hhs.gov  
Telephone: (617) 565-1258  
States: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont

**Region II – New York**  
Miechal Lefkowitz  
Email: miechal.lefkowitz@cms.hhs.gov  
Telephone: (212) 616-2517  
States: New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and Virgin Islands

**Region III – Philadelphia**  
Patrick Hamilton  
Email: patrick.hamilton@cms.hhs.gov  
Telephone: (215) 861-4097  
States: Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia

**Region IV – Atlanta**  
Lana Dennis  
Email: lana.dennis@cms.hhs.gov  
Telephone: (404) 562-7379  
States: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee

**Region V – Chicago**  
Nicole Jacobson  
Email: nicole.jacobson@cms.hhs.gov  
Telephone: (312) 353-5737  
States: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin

**Region VI – Dallas**  
Kaleigh Emerson  
Email: kaleigh.emerson@cms.hhs.gov  
Telephone: (214) 767-6444  
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**Region VII – Kansas City**  
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**Region VIII – Denver**  
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States: Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming

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Neal Logue  
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Telephone: (415) 744-3551  
States: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa

**Region X – Seattle**  
Teresa Cumpton  
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Telephone: (206) 615-2391  
States: Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington

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