

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



**CENTER FOR MEDICARE**

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**DATE:** September 29, 2023

**TO:** All Medicare Advantage Organizations, Prescription Drug Plans, Cost Plans, PACE Organizations, and Demonstrations

**FROM:** Jennifer R. Shapiro, Director, Medicare Plan Payment Group

**SUBJECT:** Annual Designation of Identity Management (IDM) Plan User Approver/External Point of Contact (EPOC) - ACTION

The purpose of this letter is to remind Medicare Advantage Organizations (MAO) and Prescription Drug Plans (PDP) of the requirements and processes that must be utilized annually to designate staff the responsibility as a CMS External Point of Contact (EPOC) for purposes of granting access to beneficiary and contract level eligibility/enrollment, payment, and premium data in CMS systems. Furthermore, this letter provides an overview of the procedure in which an EPOC should conduct the annual certification for existing end users' access.

CMS security policies require separation of duties between system administrators and users. In particular, the policy addresses the potential for abuse of authorized privileges and helps to reduce the risk of malevolent activity without collusion. Separation of duties includes, for example: (i) dividing mission functions and information system support functions among different individuals and/or roles; (ii) conducting information system support functions with different individuals (e.g., system management, programming, configuration management, quality assurance and testing, and network security); and (iii) ensuring security personnel administering access control functions do not also administer audit functions.

Separation of duties aligns privileges with appropriate roles with the idea that specific duties are distinctly different from one another in order to reduce the risk of malevolent or inappropriate behaviors based on access. Implementing this control helps reduce the risk of inappropriate access to Personally Identifiable Information (PII) or Personal Health Information (PHI) (e.g., separating employees that perform security investigations from mission and business functions).

Separation of duties regarding an EPOC is implemented by designating a selected set of administrators from the MAO/PDP and rendering them the capability to set permissions for their company's employees and /or First Tier Downstream Entities when accessing PII and PHI from CMS systems.

Identity Management (IDM) is an Internet-accessible application that will allow an

organization's employee the ability to register for access to the CMS Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug (MAPD) systems or become a designated approver for their company's end users. **Note: The EPOC's role is to approve, maintain, and certify their company's employees' access, while they themselves cannot register to access the CMS Medicare Advantage/Prescription Drug system.**

### **EPOC Rules of Behavior**

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is committed to maintaining the integrity and security of health care data in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974 and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 places restrictions on the disclosure of Medicare eligibility, enrollment, premium, premium withhold, and payment data. External Point of Contacts (EPOC) are employed representatives of a Medicare Advantage (MA) or Prescription Drug plan/sponsor (PDP) whose purpose is to manage and grant their company's employee access to the Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug System (MARx). All employee users granted access shall use Medicare beneficiary data for conducting Medicare business only.

More information on the Rules of Behavior regarding EPOC can be found on the CMS.gov webpage:

<https://www.cms.gov/research-statistics-data-and-systems/cms-information-technology/mapdhelpdesk/plan-connectivity-preparation>

### **EPOC Registration Process**

CMS requires organizations to annually select a qualified official as their EPOC, such as a manager, supervisor of Information Technology, or a Systems Security Officer. After providing the preliminary information to CMS, the EPOC utilizes IDM to assign themselves as the steward of the appropriate contract number(s) as part of completing the registration process. When CMS approves a registration request, the EPOC is then able to approve/reject their company's end user request to access the CMS systems. The following steps must be complete to designate an EPOC:

#### **Step One – Email EPOC designation letter to CMS**

CMS no longer accepts EPOC designation letters via mail. The plan must email an official company letter to CMS identifying and appointing the EPOC. Please note that an organization may submit one letter for all contract numbers and may designate up to two EPOCs for the same (or different) contract numbers for your organization. Any special requests for adding more than two EPOCs are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

#### **The EPOC designation letter must:**

- be on letterhead;
- contain all of the following information for each EPOC:
  - Name(s) of designated EPOC
  - Mailing address
  - Telephone number and extension
  - E-mail address
  - Contract number(s) for which the EPOC will approve users (list

ALL contract numbers in **alphanumeric order**)

- contain a signature of the responsible officer of the organization (the individual signing the letter cannot be an EPOC); include the name, title, mailing address, e-mail address, and telephone number of the company official signing the letter.

In addition to the letter, the plan must fill out and email a signed EPOC Access Acknowledgement Form. The template for the EPOC Designation Letter and EPOC Access Acknowledgement Form is in the [Plan Connectivity Preparation](#) section of the MAPD Help Desk website.

The EPOC designation letter and EPOC Access Acknowledgement Form should be:

- Emailed to [DPOEPOCS@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:DPOEPOCS@cms.hhs.gov) and copy [mapdhelp@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:mapdhelp@cms.hhs.gov)
- The email subject line must follow the format below:
  - EPOC Name (must match the name used to register in IDM – no nicknames)
  - Company Name
  - Contract Number(s) – if registering for more than 1, please only enter 1 contract number in subject line
  - Example: Subject: Jane Doe, Company Name, HXXXX

### **Step Two – Complete registration in IDM**

- URL – <https://portal.cms.gov>
- During the registration process, potential EPOC users should provide all of the contract numbers for which they will approve end users (they may add additional contracts later).
- Enter an e-mail account address that is specific to their organization (not a publicly available e-mail account such as Yahoo or Hotmail).
- The name used on the EPOC designation letter must match the name used to register in IDM.
- Enter a valid phone number and extension. This information is necessary in case an issue arises and CMS must contact a potential EPOC directly.

### **Step Three – Confirm receipt of CMS approval**

- CMS will not approve access until the plan has completed steps one and two.
- Once CMS approves the registration, the newly appointed EPOC will receive an e-mail from IDM confirming access granted. Once an email is received, the new EPOC can begin to approve its company's access requests.  
\*If there is no email response received, the potential EPOC should make sure to check spam folders for the email.

Any subsequent changes, additions, or deletions to a plan's EPOC designation require the plan to follow the instructions outlined above and provide CMS with a new letter that clearly identifies the changes and/or deletions. The EPOC will be able to register or add/delete contracts to their registration in IDM.

The MAPD Help Desk also manages the deletion of EPOCs that no longer need access, however an EPOC should first attempt to remove all contracts from his/her role before contacting the MAPD Help Desk. The MAPD Help Desk can be reached at 1-800-927-8069 or [mapdhelp@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:mapdhelp@cms.hhs.gov).

### **Annual Role Certification**

A plan's EPOC is required to establish a procedure for maintaining plan user access under their authority. A user review should occur twice a year, as well as annual role certification. Annual role certification is the process by which a user is granted continued use of a role for another 365 days. Annual Role Certification is required every year by CMS' security policy and is counted from the original role approval date or the previous year's certification date. EPOCs are required to certify their company's end users annually. An extension will not be granted to EPOCs who do not comply with the annual role certification timeframe since this is considered a CMS security violation. If an EPOC chooses to bulk approve plan users during the certification process, the EPOC is verifying they have thoroughly reviewed the access on each user and that access is still required and appropriate. CMS continues to perform reviews to ensure proper processing.

Due to the frequent changes in EPOC assignments and annual role certification of all users, an annual submission of an EPOC Designation Letter and EPOC Access Acknowledgement Form is required. EPOC Designation Letters and EPOC Access Acknowledgement Forms should be emailed to [DPOEPOCS@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:DPOEPOCS@cms.hhs.gov). **The deadline for submitting the letter to CMS is December 1st each year.** CMS will not approve an EPOC certification if the information is not submitted timely and will result in the removal of an EPOC's role.

EPOCs are required to keep their accounts active and current, and failure to access the IDM system within a 60-day period will suspend their account. CMS has the authority to remove access from any EPOC whose account is in a suspended status, and the user must complete the EPOC registration process again.

Instructions regarding EPOC and end user registration are documented in the Data Exchange Preparation Procedures (DEPP) located at: <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/CMS-Information-Technology/mapdhelpdesk/Plan-Connectivity-Preparation>

Please direct any questions to the MAPD Help Desk at 1-800-927-8069 or [mapdhelp@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:mapdhelp@cms.hhs.gov).