TELEPHONE INQUIRIES

1.0. TELEPHONE SYSTEM

The contractor shall provide an incoming telephone inquiry system. The telephone system shall be fully staffed, at a minimum, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. of the time zone(s) in the region. All telephones must be staffed and able to respond throughout the entire period. A recorded message indicating normal business hours shall be used on the telephone lines after hours. Calls will be handled in the order they are received. The phone number(s) shall be published on the *Explanation of Benefits (*EOB*)* and otherwise be made known to beneficiaries, providers, *Health Benefits Advisors (*HBAs*)*, and Congressional offices.

2.0. RESPONSIVENESS

Telephone inquiries shall be answered according to the standards in Chapter 1, Section 3, paragraph 3.4. Contractors may respond to telephone inquiries by letter if written response provides better service. For example, it may be difficult to reestablish telephone contact with the calling party, a written response may provide the caller with needed documentation, or a situation may call for a complex explanation which is clearer if written. The contractor staff shall be trained to respond in the most appropriate, accurate manner. Telephone inquiries reporting a potential fraud or abuse situation shall be documented and referred to the contractor's Program Integrity Unit.

3.0. REQUIREMENTS

The requirements and standards established below apply to all telephone calls. There should be no differentiation in the service provided whether the call originates locally or through the toll-free lines. The contractor shall provide the availability of telephone contact as a service to all TRICARE inquiries [*a*ctive *d*uty personnel, TRICARE beneficiaries, dual-eligible beneficiaries, Regional Directors *(RDs)*, providers, *Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) (*ASD(HA)*)*, *TRICARE Management Activity (*TMA*)*, HBAs, and congressional offices]. At a minimum the service shall be continuous during normal business hours which are defined as 8:00 A.M. through 6:00 P.M. (except weekends and holidays) in all time zones within the *contract area*. This service is intended to assist the public in securing answers to various TRICARE questions including, but not limited to:

3.1. General program information;

3.2. Specific information regarding claims in process and claims completed, e.g., explanations of the methods and specific facts employed in making reasonable charge and medical necessity determinations, information regarding types of medical services submitted (The contractor shall transfer out-of-jurisdiction calls requiring the assistance of another contractor. The contractor shall answer program information and network provider

availability/assistance calls without regard to jurisdiction*, to include identifying behavioral health providers willing to accept TRICARE*.);

3.3. When the individual beneficiaries ask questions about *Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (*DEERS*)* or DEERS eligibility, the contractor shall refer the beneficiary to the *Defense Manpower Data Center (*DMDC*)* Beneficiary Telephone Center, 6:00 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Pacific Time, toll-free 1-800-538-9552, TTY/TDD 1-866-363-2883. These numbers cannot be used by the *TRICARE Service Center (*TSC*)* or other service provider; they are only for the beneficiary's use.

3.4. Additional information needed to have a claim processed;

3.5. Information about review and appeal rights and the actions required by the beneficiary or provider to use these rights.

3.6. Information about and procedures for the TRICARE Program.

3.7. Information concerning benefit authorization requirements and procedures for obtaining authorizations. Provisions must be included to allow the transfer of calls to the authorizing organization (within the contractor's organization, to include subcontractor) without disconnecting the call.

3.8. Telephone Standards

Refer to Chapter 1, Section 3.

3.9. Toll-Free Telephone Service

Toll-free service can be provided by a number of means available from local telephone companies. These include, but are not limited to: Wide Area Telephone Service (WATS), Foreign Exchange lines (FX), etc. The contractor is not restricted to the use of any long distance carrier and may change companies at its discretion to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the toll-free service. Should changes in long distance carriers occur, these changes must be transparent to *Military Health System (*MHS*)* beneficiaries and providers. The Contracting Officer *(CO)* shall be notified of any proposed change in companies at least 30 calendar days prior to the actual change of companies. The contractor shall advertise the toll-free service using all available media including the EOB; newsletters; telephone directories published by the contractor, military organizations, etc. and other appropriate sources.

3.10. Telephone Monitoring Equipment

The contractor or telephone company with which the contractor does business shall have telephone equipment that is programmed to measure and record response time and ensure standards are always met. The equipment shall:

3.10.1. Measure busy signal level. Busy signal level is defined as the percentage of time a caller receives a busy signal. The equipment must produce busy signal data. The busy signal rate shall be expressed as a percentage, which is to be determined as follows: divide

the number of calls answered by the contractor by the number of calls reaching and attempting to reach the contractor (must be machine generated figures).

3.10.2. Measure the number of calls received each month and the time elapsing between acknowledgment and handling by a telephone representative or Automated Response Unit (ARU). (Includes all calls that are directly answered by an individual or ARU (no waiting time). The on-hold time period begins when the telephone call is acknowledged and does not include the ring time.

3.11. Additional Equipment Requirements

The contractor shall furnish the following:

3.11.1. Access to a *Computer Remote Terminal (*CRT*)* for each telephone representative to retrieve or provide the information required in paragraphs 3.0. through 3.7. The CRT shall be located to allow the telephone representatives to research data without leaving their work stations.

3.11.2. Outgoing lines sufficient to allow call backs.

3.11.3. Hard copy management reports regarding All Trunks Busy (ATB) data and the waiting time measurements. The hard copy management reports shall also include the total number of calls received, the number answered at the time of the call, the number fully answered within ten calendar days, the number fully answered within 20 calendar days, and the percentage of each.

3.11.4. A supervisor's console to monitor telephone representatives' telephone calls for accuracy, responsiveness, clarity, and tone.

3.11.5. Automatic call distributors and ARUs with after hours message recorders, an automated, interactive, 24 hour call-handling system designed to ensure maximum access to the toll-free lines. This system shall provide automated responses to requests for general program information and to beneficiary requests for claims status.

4.0. REPORTS

See Chapter 15, Section 3 for the Contractor Monthly Toll-Free Telephone Report.

5.0. TELEPHONE APPRAISAL SYSTEM

The contractor shall establish a monitoring system or other methods to ensure quality of performance.