

Telephone Inquiries

1.0 TELEPHONE SYSTEM

1.1 The contractor shall provide an incoming telephone inquiry system. All telephones must be staffed and able to respond in a manner that meets performance standards 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, Beneficiary Counselling and Assistance Coordinators (BCACs), Debt Collection and Assistance Officer (DCAO), Health Benefit Advisors (HBAs), and Congressional offices.

1.2 The telephone system must include a 24-hour, seven days a week, nationally accessible service, for all Military Health System (MHS) beneficiaries, including beneficiaries traveling in the contractor's region, seeking information and/or assistance in locating a network provider. Callers seeking this information must have the ability to speak with live personnel. These personnel shall be able to enter authorizations for urgent care for beneficiaries traveling outside of their Prime Service Area (PSA).

2.0 RESPONSIVENESS

Telephone inquiries shall be answered according to the standards in [Chapter 1, Section 3](#). Contractors may respond to telephone inquiries by letter if they cannot contact the caller by phone or if a complex explanation is required. 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

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 (active duty personnel, TRICARE beneficiaries, dual-eligible beneficiaries, Regional Directors (RDs), providers, Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) (ASD(HA)), TRICARE Management Activity (TMA), BCACs, DCAOs, HBAs, and Congressional offices). At a minimum, the telephone system shall be fully staffed and 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 region. All customer service provided by telephone shall be without long distance charges to the beneficiary. Telephone 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, including explanations of the methods and specific facts employed in making reasonable charge and medical necessity determinations, and 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.);

3.3 When the inquiry concerns questions about Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) or DEERS eligibility, the contractor shall refer the caller 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 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, paragraph 3.4](#).

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), and Foreign Exchange (FX) lines. 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 MHS beneficiaries and providers. The Procuring Contracting Officer (PCO) 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 determine whether standards are always met. The Managed Care Support Contractor (MCSC) will provide to

TMA Communications and Customer Service (C&CS) and the TRICARE Regional Offices (TROs) the opportunity to provide real-time monitoring of call center operations. The equipment shall provide machine-generated counts to:

3.10.1 Measure Busy Signal Level

“Busy signal level” is defined as the percentage of time a caller receives a busy signal. 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.

3.10.2 Measure Call Volumes And Handling Times

Contractors shall 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). Measures shall include 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 CRT for each telephone representative to retrieve or provide the information required in [paragraphs 3.0](#) through [3.7](#). The Computer Remote Terminal (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 where all questions presented were answered at the time of the call, the number fully answered within 10 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

Telephone activity shall be reported in accordance with contract requirements.

5.0 TELEPHONE APPRAISAL SYSTEM

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

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