

Medicare Medical Policy

PHA Medicare Advantage Medical Policy Development and Application

MEDICARE MEDICAL POLICY NUMBER: 50

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PURPOSE.....	2
APPLICATION OF BENEFITS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
MEDICARE DEFINITION OF MEDICAL NECESSITY	2
DEVELOPMENT OF A PHA MEDICARE MEDICAL POLICY.....	2
CONTINUED MANAGEMENT OF PHA MEDICARE MEDICAL POLICIES.....	7
REFERENCES.....	7
POLICY REVISION HISTORY.....	9

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE: Company Medicare Medical Policies serve as guidance for the administration of plan benefits and do not constitute medical advice nor a guarantee of coverage. Company Medicare Medical Policies are reviewed annually to guide the coverage or non-coverage decision-making process for services or procedures in accordance with member benefit contracts (otherwise known as Evidence of Coverage or EOCs) and Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) policies, manuals, and other CMS rules and regulations. In the absence of a CMS coverage determination or specific regulation for a requested service, item or procedure, Company policy criteria or applicable utilization management vendor criteria may be applied. These are based upon published, peer-reviewed scientific evidence and evidence-based clinical practice guidelines that are available as of the last policy update. Coverage decisions are made on the basis of individualized determinations of medical necessity and the experimental or investigational character of the treatment in the individual case. In cases where medical necessity is not established by policy for specific treatment modalities, evidence not previously considered regarding the efficacy of the modality that is presented shall be given consideration to determine if the policy represents current standards of care.

The Company reserves the right to determine the application of Medicare Medical Policies and make revisions to these policies at any time. Any conflict or variance between the EOC and Company Medical Policy will be resolved in favor of the EOC.

SCOPE: Providence Health Plan, Providence Health Assurance, and Providence Plan Partners as applicable (referred to individually as “Company” and collectively as “Companies”).

PRODUCT AND BENEFIT APPLICATION

Medicare Only

PURPOSE

Medicare Advantage medical policies provide the criteria used to determine when medical services, procedures, or items/devices are considered “medically reasonable and necessary” (also called “medically necessary”). Use of these policies ensures consistent and clinically appropriate outcomes during the decision-making process.

CMS requires Medicare Advantage Organizations (MAOs) to provide the same medical benefits as Original Medicare. This means MAOs are required follow National Coverage Determinations (NCDs), as well as Local Coverage Determinations (LCDs) developed by the Medicare Contractor (MAC) assigned jurisdiction over their service area(s).

MAOs are also required to follow general coverage and benefit conditions under Traditional Medicare regulatory rules, including the use of the same coverage criteria to determine if a service, procedure or item would be considered “medically reasonable and necessary.”

MEDICARE AND MEDICAL NECESSITY

For Medicare guidelines regarding medical necessity¹, see the Medicare Advantage medical policy, *Definition of Medically Reasonable and Necessary (Medical Necessity)* ([MP360](#)).

Medicare’s medical necessity protocols should be applied regardless of whether the service is approved by Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or included in a Medicare Fee Schedule.

1. The issuance of a CPT/HCPCS code to a device or procedure does not in itself automatically imply the procedure is medically reasonable and necessary.⁴ Coverage determinations also include medical services and technologies reported with an unspecified (unlisted) CPT or HCPCS code.
2. Approval by the FDA also does not automatically imply medical necessity of a service or item under Medicare. While the FDA determines safety and effectiveness of a device or drug, it does not establish medical necessity under the Medicare Program. Medicare may reference FDA determinations regarding safety and effectiveness, but it is Medicare or its contractors who evaluate services, procedures, drugs or technology to determine if they may be considered Medicare covered services or are reasonable and necessary for Medicare members under *§1862(a)(1)(A)*.

DEVELOPMENT OF A PHA MEDICARE MEDICAL POLICY

CRITERIA DEVELOPMENT FOR PHA MEDICARE ADVANTAGE MEDICAL POLICIES

The development of a PHA Medicare Advantage Medical Policy is based on a hierarchy of coverage determination. To ensure PHA Medicare Advantage Medical Policies are aligned with Original Medicare coverage determinations, policies are based on Medicare coverage manuals and/or provisions, NCDs,

LCDs, LCAs, and Medicare Learning Network (MLN) documents, when such are available. When no policy or guideline is available from any of the resources noted above, PHA Medicare medical policy may be based on an evidence-based commercial medical policy or medical utilization vendor.

According to the Medicare Managed Care Manual (Chapter 4):

“...(A)n item or service classified as an original Medicare benefit must be covered by every MA plan if:

- Its coverage is consistent with general coverage guidelines included in original Medicare regulations, manuals and instructions (unless superseded by written Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) instructions or regulations regarding Part C of the Medicare program);
- It is covered by CMS’ national coverage determinations...; or
- It is covered by written coverage decisions of local Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs) with jurisdiction for claims in the geographic area in which services are covered under the MA plan...”⁵

As such, the following policy hierarchy is used to guide medical necessity determination of all PHA Medicare medical policies:

Medicare-Based References and Resources

- **CMS Coverage Manuals and Provisions**

CMS coverage manuals/provisions may be used as the basis for medical policy development to determine the medical necessity of medical services.

Examples of a CMS coverage manual which may be referenced includes the Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, the Medicare Claims Processing Manual, and the Medicare Managed Care Manual.

- **National Coverage Determinations (NCDs) and Final Decision Memorandums**

When no CMS coverage manual/provision is available, or if further definition of a CMS coverage manual/provision is required, then an NCD may be used as the basis for medical policy development to determine the medical necessity of medical services.

“NCDs are developed by CMS to describe the circumstances for Medicare coverage nationwide for a specific medical service procedure or device. NCDs generally outline the conditions for which a service is considered to be covered (or not covered) and usually issued as a program instruction.”⁶ NCDs are binding for Medicare, Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs), and Medicare Advantage Organizations (MAOs).^{5,7,8}

Coverage policy found in NCDs also includes Medicare Final Decision Memorandums (Memos) for new or revised NCDs. According to CMS, “...the effective date for the NCD is the same date as the publication date of the final decision memorandum. Therefore, we have found it expedient and practical to include the NCD that is included in the Medicare National Coverage Determination manual in the final decision memoranda and to use that date as the effective date for Medicare coverage and payment purposes.”⁹

Therefore, final decision memorandums (memos) that are published for new or revised NCDs may also be included in Company Medicare medical policies until the NCD is formally updated.

- **Local Coverage Determinations (LCDs), Local Coverage Articles (LCAs) and Other Publications by a Medicare Contractor**

When no Medicare coverage manual/provision or NCD is available, or if further definition of a Medicare coverage manual/provision or NCD is required, then an LCD and/or LCA, may be used as the basis for medical policy development to determine the medical necessity of medical services.

According to Medicare:

“An LCD, as defined in §1869(f)(2)(B) of the Social Security Act (SSA), is a determination by a Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) respecting whether or not a particular item or service is covered on a contractor–wide basis in accordance with section 1862(a)(1)(A) of the Act.”^{10,11}

LCAs include billing and coding articles, response to comment (RTC) articles, as well as other types of educational documents.^{12,13} According to Noridian:

“The term "article" is used to describe any bulletin article, website article, educational handout or any other non-LCD document intended for public release that contains coverage/coding statements or medical review related billing or claims considerations.

“Medicare contractors post articles into the Medicare Coverage Database (MCD). Articles address local coverage, coding or medical review related billing and claims considerations, and may include any newly developed educational materials, coding instructions or clarification of existing medical review related billing or claims policy.”¹⁴

Noridian Healthcare Solutions (Noridian) Jurisdiction F (J-F) is the designated MAC contracted to cover the states of Oregon and Washington.

MACs with Exclusive Jurisdiction over a Medicare Item or Service

According to the Medicare Managed Care Manual (Chapter 4):

“A MAC outside of the plan’s service area sometimes has exclusive jurisdiction over a Medicare covered item or service. In some instances, one Medicare A/B MAC processes all of the claims for a particular Medicare-covered item or service for all Medicare beneficiaries around the country. This generally occurs when there is only one supplier of a particular item, medical device or diagnostic test (for example; certain pathology and lab tests furnished by independent laboratories). In this situation, MA plans must follow the coverage requirements or LCD of the MAC that enrolled the supplier and processes all of the Medicare claims for that item, test or service.”¹⁵

In addition, “Services for an enrollee from a provider outside the service area are covered based on the local coverage determinations of that provider’s geographic location.”¹⁶ Therefore, the Company may reference local coverage policies and articles by Medicare contractors from other service areas when necessary to remain compliant with Medicare regulations.

NCDs, LCDs, and LCAs can be accessed from the [Medicare Coverage Database \(MCD\) website](#), while other Noridian articles and other communications can be found on Noridian’s website.

Use of LCDs by MACs of Other Service Areas

While not a common occurrence, the Company may opt to adopt a local coverage policy (LCD) by a MAC other than the MAC with jurisdiction over the plan’s service area. This is typically done *in lieu of* using internal coverage criteria. However, according to CMS rules, similar requirements must be met because non-jurisdictional MAC LCDs are treated the same as internal coverage criteria developed by the MAO.¹⁷

- **Medicare Learning Network® (MLN)**

When no CMS coverage manual/provision, NCD, or LCD/LCA is available, MLN Matters® Articles may be used as the basis for medical policy development to determine the medical necessity of medical services.¹⁷

In the Absence of Medicare-Based Coverage Criteria

- **Commercial Medical Policies**

In the absence of a Medicare policy, Medicare guidelines allow for the MAO to apply an objective, evidence-based review to reach a coverage determination.¹⁸ The Medicare Managed Care Manual (Chapter 4, §90.5) reads as follows:

“In coverage situations where there is no NCD, LCD, or guidance on coverage in original Medicare manuals, an MAO may adopt the coverage policies of other MAOs in its service area.

However, if the MAO decides not to use coverage policies of other MAOs in its service area, the MAO:

- Must make its own coverage determination;
- Must provide CMS an objective evidence-based rationale relying on authoritative evidence such as:
 - Studies from government agencies (e.g. the FDA);
 - Evaluations performed by independent technology assessment groups (e.g. BCBSA); and
 - Well-designed controlled clinical studies that have appeared in peer review journals; and
- In providing its justification, the MAO may not use conclusory statements with no accompanying rationale.”¹⁸

According to the CMS Final Rule CMS-4201-F:

“MA plans must comply with national coverage determinations (NCD), local coverage determinations (LCD), and general coverage and benefit conditions included in Traditional Medicare laws. This includes criteria for determining whether an item or service is a benefit available under Traditional Medicare. When coverage criteria are not fully established in Medicare statute, regulation, NCD, or LCD, MA organizations may create publicly accessible internal coverage criteria that are based on current evidence in widely used treatment guidelines or clinical literature.”¹⁹

Medicare NCD, LCD, or general coverage criteria are considered not to be fully established when:

- A. Additional, unspecified criteria are needed to interpret or supplement general provisions in order to determine medical necessity consistently.
 - a. The MAO must demonstrate that the additional criteria provide clinical benefits that are highly likely to outweigh any clinical harms, including from delayed or decreased access to items or services;
- B. Available NCDs or LCDs include flexibility that explicitly allows for coverage in circumstances beyond the specific indications that are listed in an NCD or LCD; or
- C. There is an absence of any applicable Medicare statutes, regulations, NCDs or LCDs setting forth coverage criteria.²⁰

Examples of situations where fully established Medicare criteria are considered to be “not available” or requirement supplemental criteria for consistent coverage outcomes include, but may not be limited to, any the following:

- A Medicare coverage policy exists (e.g., an NCD, LCD or other Medicare manual), but additional criteria are needed to interpret or support general provisions.
- A Medicare coverage policy exists, but it does not include specific coverage criteria. The policy may provide broad guidelines, but it may not have enough detail to decide if individual requests are medically necessary.
- An NCD or LCD explicitly allows flexibility within the coverage criteria it provides.
- A Medicare coverage policy exists for a service, but does not provide guidance for coverage of the specific condition for the request received.
- There is no applicable Local Coverage Article (LCA; these are generally used with an LCD) to assist with medical necessity decision-making.
- There is no applicable NCD, LCD, other Medicare coverage manual, or other Medicare regulatory or statutory guidance available to assist with medical necessity decision-making.

In the absence of a Medicare coverage policy or guideline as described above, the Company’s commercial (internal) medical policies may be used for medical necessity determinations.

- **Use of Independent Third-Party Proprietary Tools**

For some services, when fully established CMS criteria are not available, the Company may choose to not develop its own internal coverage criteria, but instead will use independent third-party, proprietary tools to ensure consistent coverage determination outcomes. Examples include, but may not be limited to, Carelon (formerly AIM), InterQual®, and eviCore.

Reminder: While Medicare Advantage medical policies are generally expected to apply to the majority of Medicare Advantage plan members, the unique clinical details of an individual member’s needs should be considered and reviewed to make a final medical necessity decision.

APPROVAL PROCESS

Policy drafts are presented to the Medical Policy Committee for final approval. The Committee consists of physician medical directors and other professional staff from the Company service area, including input regarding our policies received from external practicing physicians and other health care professionals who are independent and free of conflict relative to the MA organization and MA plan. Our utilization management (UM) committee also includes at least one individual with expertise in health equity, to ensure adequate representation.²²

Any actively practicing physician who is interested in becoming involved in the PHP UM Committee can contact the Medical Policy team, or review information on our [MPC External Physician Review website](#).

CONTINUED MANAGEMENT OF PHA MEDICARE MEDICAL POLICIES

The Medicare Medical Policies are reviewed and updated annually at a minimum. Policies may be reviewed more often in the event new information is published by Medicare, Noridian or other MACs, or as new evidence that alters the clinical criteria becomes available.

Medicare medical policy revisions to existing policies for both interim updates and annual reviews are also presented to the Medical Policy Committee (described above under “Approval Process”) for final vetting and approval.

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POLICY REVISION HISTORY

DATE	REVISION SUMMARY
12/2022	Annual review (converted to new format 2/2023)
1/2024	Annual review, no change to existing content; add guidance from CMS-4201-F
1/2025	Annual review, minor revisions to existing content; add guidance from CMS-4205-F
1/2026	Annual review, minor revisions