

Maricopa County's Group Health Plan - Notice of Privacy Practices



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The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, otherwise known as HIPAA, requires Maricopa County to protect the privacy of your personal health information, and to provide you with this notice. HIPAA is a federal law that was effective April 14, 2003. The reason the law requires Maricopa County to provide you with this notice is because certain benefit programs administered through the Employee Health Initiatives Department are considered to be a Group Health Plan that is regulated by this law. This notice explains how your personal health information may be used, and what kind of rights you have under this law.

THIS INFORMATION DESCRIBES HOW MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

Maricopa County offers a Group Health Plan (the "Plan"), which is a type of Health Plan, for eligible regular employees, certain contract employees, employees of affiliated organizations, retirees, and COBRA participants.

The Plan is required by law to take reasonable steps to ensure the privacy of your personally identifiable health information and to inform you about:

- the Plan's uses and disclosures of your Protected Health Information (PHI)
- your rights with respect to your PHI;
- the Plan's duties with respect to your PHI;
- your right to file a complaint with the Plan and to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
and
- the person or office to contact for further information about the Plan's privacy practices

The term "Protected Health Information" ("PHI") includes all individually identifiable health information transmitted or maintained by the Plan whether oral, written, or electronic.

SECTION 1. NOTICE OF PHI USES AND DISCLOSURES

Upon your request, the Plan is required to give you access to certain PHI in order to inspect and copy it. Use and disclosure of your PHI may be required by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to investigate or determine the Plan's compliance with the privacy regulations.

Uses and Disclosures to Carry Out Treatment, Payment, and Health Care Operations

The entities that provide coverage under your medical, prescription, behavioral health and substance abuse, dental, vision, flexible spending accounts, and COBRA, may share your PHI for treatment purposes, to get paid for treatment, or to conduct health care operations. Many of these entities may provide you with their own Notice of Privacy Practices. Refer to Table A for a list of the current entities that provide the above coverages.

The Plan and/or its business associates may use your PHI, without your consent, authorization, or opportunity to agree or object, to carry out treatment, payment, and health care operations. For each business associate, the Plan has a written contract that contains terms to protect the privacy of your PHI.

The Plan may also share your information or allow the sharing of your PHI with Maricopa County as the Plan Sponsor for plan administration functions. The Plan Sponsor has amended its plan documents to protect your PHI as required by federal law.

Treatment is defined as the provision, coordination, or management of health care and related services. It also includes but is not limited to consultations and referrals between one or more of your providers. In addition, providers may share information with each other. The Plan does not use PHI for treatment purposes.

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Payment includes, but is not limited to, actions to make coverage determinations and payment (including billing, premium payment, claims management, subrogation, coordination of benefits, reviews for medical necessity and appropriateness of care and utilization review and pre-authorizations). For example, the Plan may tell a doctor (provider) whether you are eligible for coverage or what percentage of the bill will be paid by the Plan.

Health care operations include, but are not limited to, quality assessment and improvement, reviewing competence or qualifications of health care professionals, underwriting, premium rating, and other insurance activities relating to creating or renewing insurance contracts. It also includes disease management, case management, conducting or arranging for medical review, legal services and auditing functions including fraud and abuse compliance programs, business planning and development, business management and general administrative activities. For example, the Plan may use information about your claims to determine compliance with physician-issued prescriptions, refer you to a disease or case management program, project future benefit costs or audit the accuracy of its claims processing functions.

Uses and Disclosures That Require Your Written Authorization

Your written authorization will be obtained before the Plan will use or disclose PHI for employer-related activities that include, but are not limited to, ombudsman activities which includes resolving your claims issue, fitness for duty examinations, short term disability claims, return to work program, employee assistance plan, ergonomics evaluations, wellness programs, workers' compensations claims, and care received at an on-site medical clinic. You may revoke your authorization in writing, at anytime, to stop any future uses or disclosures.

Certain types of PHI, including PHI regarding communicable disease and HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse treatment, and evaluation and treatment for serious mental illness, may have additional protection under state or federal law. Your written authorization is required in order to release this type of information.

Uses and Disclosures That Require You Be Given an Opportunity to Agree or Disagree Prior To the Use or Release

Disclosure of your PHI to family members, other relatives, and your close friends is allowed if:

- the information is directly relevant to the family or friend's involvement with your care or payment for that care, and
- you either have agreed to the disclosure or have been given an opportunity to object and have not objected.

Uses and Disclosures for Which Consent, Authorization, or Opportunity to Object Is Not Required

Use and disclosure of your PHI is allowed without your consent, authorization, or request under the following circumstances:

1. When required by law.
2. When authorized by law regarding when you have been exposed to a communicable disease or are at risk of spreading a disease or condition.
3. When authorized by law to report information about abuse, neglect, or domestic violence to public authorities if there exists a reasonable belief that you may be a victim of abuse, neglect, or domestic violence. In such case, the Plan will promptly inform you that such a disclosure has been or will be made unless that notice could cause a risk or serious harm. For purposes of reporting child abuse or neglect, it is not necessary to inform the minor that such a disclosure has been or will be made. Disclosure may generally be made to the minor's parents or other representatives although there may be circumstances under federal or state law when the parents or other representatives may not be given access to the minor's PHI.
4. The Plan may disclose your PHI to a public health oversight agency for oversight activities authorized by law. This includes uses or disclosures in civil, administrative or criminal investigations, inspections, and licensure or for disciplinary actions (for example, to investigate complaints against providers); and other activities necessary for appropriate oversight of government benefit programs (for example, to investigate health care fraud).
5. The Plan may disclose your PHI when required for judicial or administrative proceedings. For example, your PHI may be disclosed in response to a subpoena or discovery request provided certain conditions are met. One of those conditions is that satisfactory assurances must be given to the Plan that the requesting party has made a good faith attempt to provide written notice to you, and the notice provided sufficient information about the proceeding to permit you to raise an objection and no objections were raised or were resolved in favor of disclosure by the court or tribunal.
6. When required for law enforcement purposes (for example, to report certain types of wounds).
7. For law enforcement purposes, including for the purpose of identifying or locating a suspect, fugitive, material witness or missing person. Also, when disclosing information about an individual who is or is suspected to be a victim of a crime but only if the individual agrees to the disclosure or the covered entity is unable to obtain the individual's agreement because of emergency circumstances. Furthermore, the law enforcement official must represent that the information is not intended to be used against the individual, the immediate law enforcement activity would be materially and adversely affected by waiting to obtain the individual's agreement and disclosure is in the best interest of the individual as determined by the exercise of the Plan's best judgment.
8. When required to be given to a coroner or medical examiner for the purpose of identifying a deceased person, determining a cause of death or other duties as authorized by law. Also, disclosure is permitted to funeral directors, consistent with applicable law, as necessary to carry out their duties with respect to the decedent.
9. The Plan may use or disclose PHI for research, subject to conditions.

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10. When consistent with applicable law and standards of ethical conduct if the Plan, in good faith, believes the use or disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the health or safety of a person or the public and the disclosure is to a person reasonably able to prevent or lessen the threat, including the target of the threat.
11. When authorized by and to the extent necessary to comply with workers' compensation or other similar programs established by law.

Except as otherwise indicated in this notice, uses and disclosures will be made only with your written authorization subject to your right to revoke such authorization.

SECTION 2. RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS

Right to Request Restrictions on PHI Uses and Disclosures

You may request the Plan to restrict uses and disclosures of your PHI to carry out treatment, payment or health care operations, or to restrict uses and disclosures to family members, relatives, friends or other persons identified by you who are involved in your care or payment for your care. However, the Plan is not required to agree to your request. The Plan will accommodate reasonable requests to receive communications of PHI by alternative means or at alternative locations. You or your personal representative will be required to complete a form to request restrictions on uses and disclosures of your PHI. Such requests should be made in writing to the **Employee Health Initiatives Manager, at 301 S. 4th Avenue, Suite B100, Phoenix, AZ 85003.**

Right to Inspect and Copy PHI

You have a right to inspect and obtain a copy of your PHI contained in a "designated record set," for as long as the Plan maintains the PHI. "Protected Health Information" (PHI) includes all individually identifiable health information transmitted or maintained by the Plan, regardless of form. "Designated Record Set" includes the medical records and billing records about individuals maintained by or for a covered health care provider; enrollment, payment, billing, claims adjudication and case or medical management record systems maintained by or for a health plan; or other information used in whole or in part by or for the covered entity to make decisions about individuals. Information used for quality control or peer review analyses and not used to make decisions about individuals is not in the designated record set. The requested information will be provided within 30 days if the information is maintained on site or within 60 days if the information is maintained offsite. A single 30-day extension is allowed if the Plan is unable to comply with the deadline. You or your personal representative will be required to complete a form to request access to the PHI in your designated record set. Requests for access to PHI should be made in writing to the **Employee Health Initiatives Manager, 301 W. 4th Avenue, Suite B100, Phoenix, AZ 85003.** If access is denied, you or your personal representative will be provided with a written denial setting forth the basis for the denial, a description of how you may exercise those review rights and a description of how you may complain to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Right to Amend PHI

If you believe your PHI is erroneous or incomplete, you have the right to request the Plan to amend your PHI or a record about you in a designated record set for as long as the PHI is maintained in the designated record set. You must make this request in writing and provide a reason to support your request. The Plan has 60 days after the request is made to act on the request. A single 30-day extension is allowed if the Plan is unable to comply with the deadline. If the request is denied in whole or part, the Plan must provide you with a written denial that explains the basis for the denial. You or your personal representative may then submit a written statement disagreeing with the denial and have that statement included with any future disclosures of your PHI. Requests for amendment of PHI in a designated record set should be made in writing to the **Employee Health Initiatives Manager, 301 W. 4th Avenue, Suite B100, Phoenix, AZ 85003.** You or your personal representative will be required to complete a form to request amendment of the PHI in your designated record set.

The Right to Receive an Accounting of PHI Disclosures

At your request, the Plan will also provide you with an accounting of disclosures by the Plan of your PHI during the six years prior to the date of your request, but not before April 14, 2003. However, such accounting need not include PHI disclosures made: (1) to carry out treatment, payment or health care operations; (2) to individuals about their own PHI; (3) prior to the compliance date; or (4) based on your written authorization. If the accounting cannot be provided within 60 days, an additional 30 days is allowed if the individual is given a written statement of the reasons for the delay and the date by which the accounting will be provided. If you request more than one accounting within a 12-month period, the Plan will charge a reasonable, cost-based fee for each subsequent accounting.

The Right to Receive a Paper copy of This Notice upon Request

To obtain a paper copy of this Notice, contact the **Employee Health Initiatives Manager in writing at 301 W. 4th Avenue, Suite B100, Phoenix, AZ 85003.**

SECTION 3. THE PLAN'S DUTIES

The Plan is required by law to maintain the privacy of PHI and to provide individuals (participants and beneficiaries) with notice of its legal duties and privacy practices. This is effective beginning April 14, 2003 and the Plan is required to comply with the terms of this notice. However, the Plan reserves the right to change its privacy practices and to apply the changes to any PHI received or maintained by the Plan prior to that date. If a privacy practice is changed, a revised version of this notice will be provided to all participants for whom the Plan still maintains PHI. The notice will be distributed electronically via the Electronic Business Center (EBC) Intranet Benefit Home page. Any revised version of this notice will be distributed within 60 days of the effective date of any material change to the uses or disclosures, the individuals rights, the duties of the Plan or other privacy practices stated in this notice.

