



CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES

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TO: All Medicare Advantage (MA), Prescription Drug Plan (PDP), and Cost Organizations

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SUBJECT: State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) *UniqueID* Program

The SHIP *UniqueID* program allows SHIP counselors to obtain information from 1-800-Medicare customer service representatives (CSR) and the CMS Coordination of Benefits (COB) contractor so that they can assist Medicare beneficiaries with claims-related issues and other concerns.

Under this program, SHIP program directors assign unique IDs to SHIP counselors that:

- Have been trained on privacy policies and procedures,
- Have signed a client confidentiality privacy statement, and
- Understand that they are accountable for the protection of a beneficiary's personal information.

Since 2007, many MA and Part D organizations have participated in the program as well. CMS encourages plans that have not already done so to participate in the SHIP *UniqueID* program and/or support a dedicated toll-free phone line for SHIP callers.

How the SHIP *UniqueID* program works

1. Plans download a file of SHIP unique IDs from the Complaints Tracking Module (CTM) in the Health Plan Management System (HPMS). Each unique ID is a 7-character access code (e.g., CT99999). The first 2 positions are alpha characters that denote the United States Postal Service recognized two-letter state abbreviation, while the remaining 5 characters are numeric and automatically generated by a CMS contracted source. This feature allows the search of a specific counselor in order to verify the required

information since the database is alphabetically organized by state abbreviation. For example, MD99999 may represent John Doe from Maryland's SHIP program.

2. When a SHIP counselor contacts the plan's call center, the call center should be instructed to disclose information to a SHIP counselor when the following conditions are met:
 - a. The SHIP counselor has written or verbal authorization from a beneficiary or their representative to discuss a beneficiary's plan issues or concerns; **and**
 - b. The counselor is listed on the SHIP *UniqueID* database on HPMS.

If both 2a and 2b are met, the plan CSR must ask questions to verify the identity of the beneficiary (i.e., full name, date of birth, Medicare number, and one additional piece of information, such as address, phone number, or the effective date(s) of Medicare A and/or B). The CSR must also ask questions to verify the identity of the SHIP counselor (e.g., her/his full name, state program name of the SHIP, or the state from which they are calling).

If both 2a or 2b are **not** met, the plan CSR must **not** disclose any information pertaining to the Medicare beneficiary to the SHIP counselor.

Please note that this process does NOT replace or supersede those situations where a Medicare beneficiary: (1) is sitting in the SHIP office with a counselor and is able to speak to the CSR to verify disclosure authorization, or (2) calls the SHIP, and the counselor, in turn, brings the CSR into the call and the CSR confirms authorization while on that 3-way call.

How to indicate your organization's participation in the SHIP *UniqueID* program

To participate in the SHIP *UniqueID* program, plans must complete the following yes/no question in the HPMS Basic Contract Management module:

Does this organization honor SHIP/SMP counselors Unique IDs to assist your customers?

By responding "yes" to this question in HPMS, a plan indicates its participation in the program and its acceptance of the SHIP unique ID to assist Medicare beneficiaries.

Please use the following navigation path to access this question:

HPMS > Contract Management > Basic Contract Management > Enter Contract Number > Expand General Information > Org Marketing Data

How to access the SHIP *UniqueID* database in HPMS

The SHIP Unique ID database is updated on a monthly basis and posted for download in the HPMS CTM.

Please use the following navigation path to download the file:

HPMS > Monitoring > Complaints Tracking Module > Documentation > Download SHIP Unique ID File

In order to access the CTM module to download the SHIP *UniqueID* database, each user must have the following:

1. An active CMS user ID with the HPMS production job code assigned (HPMS_Prod_AWS);
2. One or more contract numbers assigned to the user ID in HPMS; and
3. The following HPMS access type assigned to the user ID:
 - a. CTM Caseworker - Plan
 - i. Organizations must request that this access type be assigned to individual plan users via hpms_access@cms.hhs.gov.

Consultants may also perform this work on behalf of plan sponsors in HPMS. Please refer to the May 26, 2021 HPMS memo entitled “Updated - Instructions for Requesting Consultant Access to the Health Plan Management System (HPMS)” for detailed guidance on requesting this type of access.

General HPMS user access guidance is available at the following website:
<https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Computer-Data-and-Systems/HPMS/UserIDProcess.html>

For additional information on the SHIP *UniqueID* program, please contact Gwendolyn Green at Gwendolyn.Green@cms.hhs.gov.

For technical assistance with HPMS, please contact the HPMS Help Desk at either hpms@cms.hhs.gov or 1-800-220-2028.