
Letter Number 2020-01

Date: May 19, 2020

Dental Plans [X]

Vision Plans [X]

Subject: Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) Call Letter

This is our annual call letter to FEDVIP Carriers. Because we are requesting applications for the upcoming seven-year contract period, effective January 1, 2021, the focus of this call letter is to outline OPM's continuing priorities and request information on priority issues. This year, we are continuing our focus on improving quality and affordability, ensuring service to the disabled, and addressing the opioid crisis. In addition, we would like to draw your attention to the issue of low-value care, and what FEDVIP Carriers can do to avoid offering procedures that have little true benefit to enrollees.

Improving Quality and Affordability

FEDVIP is intended to provide quality dental and vision benefits which are affordable to all active and retired Federal employees and certain uniformed service members and their families. We encourage both dental and vision carriers to consider processes which will improve quality and affordability of your plans. This includes ongoing consideration of ADA guidelines, and clinical research that identifies cost effective and appropriate care.

Ensuring Service to the Disabled

You must include providers in your networks qualified to serve disabled patients. We ask that you continue to encourage providers to offer features and benefits that serve the FEDVIP population with special needs. Providing

services to this population requires compassion and understanding. We ask you to encourage your networks to focus on the needs of these patients to ensure they may receive services.

Opioid Abuse Prevention

As we indicated in the last two call letters, FEDVIP carriers can play a vital role in addressing the national opioid crisis. Studies reveal that prescription medications, even when taken as directed, are often the gateway to addiction. A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* indicated a link between filling an opioid prescription after wisdom tooth extraction and long-term opioid use.¹ Please urge your network dental providers to make non-opioid regimens their first choice for pain management. When opioids are needed, experts advise prescribing the lowest possible dose and shortest treatment duration. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) notes that 3 days or less will often be sufficient; more than seven days will rarely be needed.² The American Dental Association issued policy consistent with these guidelines for prescribing opioids in 2018. Dental providers should also educate their patients about the proper disposal of unused medications. We are asking plans to identify specific examples of your efforts to curb opioid abuse.

Addressing Low-Value Care such as Unnecessary Diagnostic Testing

The National Academy of Medicine estimated in 2013 that 30 percent of US healthcare spending is wasted.³ A recent *JAMA* article came to similar

¹ Calista M. Harbaugh, MD; Romesh P. Nalliah, DDS, MHCM; Hsou Mei Hu, PhD, MBA; et al; Persistent Opioid Use After Wisdom Tooth Extraction. *JAMA*. 2018;320(5):504-506. doi:10.1001/jama.2018.9023 (published online August 7, 2018)

² Dowell D, Haegerich TM, Chou R. CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain — United States, 2016. *MMWR Recomm Rep* 2016;65(No. RR-1):1-49. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.rr6501e1>

³ Institute of Medicine 2013. *Best Care at Lower Cost: The Path to Continuously Learning Health Care in America*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/13444>.

conclusions.⁴ Low value care is generally viewed as care having a high risk to cause harm versus its benefit, care provided in an inefficient manner or that is clinically inappropriate, or care where there are safer, more cost-effective alternatives.

OPM's goal is for its members to receive high-quality, high-value care. Toward this goal, we are asking FEDVIP dental carriers to identify specific examples of low-value dental care that should no longer be covered benefits (or will receive enhanced review) for FEDVIP members.

Your response to this call letter must be received by May 31, 2020 by email to connie.delorimier@opm.gov. If you have any questions, please contact Connie deLorimier.

Sincerely,

Edward M. DeHarde
Assistant Director
Healthcare and Insurance

Encl.:

⁴ Shrank WH, Rogstad TL, Parekh N. Waste in the US Health Care System – Estimated Costs and Potential for Savings. *JAMA*. 2019; doi: 10.1001/jama.2019.13978 (published online October 7, 2019).