

How the Stage 1 Meaningful Use Extension Benefits Your Practice

The opportunity to receive electronic health record (EHR) meaningful use Stage 1 Medicare and Medicaid incentive funds has been extended through the end of 2013 for eligible professionals (EPs). Stage 1, originally planned for 2011 and 2012 attestation, has been extended through 2013. Stage 2 is now planned to begin in 2014.

The changes put forth Nov. 30, 2011 by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) benefits providers and practices that have already attested and received incentive funds in 2011, as well as those planning to attest in 2012 by adding another year of Stage 1 funding.

EPs attesting in the Medicare program in 2011 can continue to attest in 2012 and 2013 and receive three years of Stage 1 incentives totaling \$38,000 per EP per practice. EPs attesting in the Medicaid program can also receive an additional year of Stage 1 funds, which beginning in 2011 would total \$38,250. EPs attesting for either program in 2012 would still receive maximum first-year attestation funds (\$18,000 and \$21,250 respectively), followed by a second year of incentives in 2013.

The extension of Stage 1 was done to foster increased EHR adoption nationally within the foundational Stage 1 reporting criteria; allow adequate time for EHR providers to embed more sophisticated Stage 2 requirements and certification into their technology; and for providers to assess advanced criteria options.

A [study](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also released Nov. 30 found that more than half of all office-based providers in the United States plan to pursue EHR adoption and meaningful use funding, and that EHR adoption by providers has already increased from 17 percent in 2008 to 34 percent through 2011. As of October 2011, \$1.2 billion has been received by EPs and hospitals through the meaningful use program.

Stage 2 attestation will begin in 2014 for all EPs in both the Medicare and Medicaid pathways.

HHS plans to formalize the extension and propose Stage 2 criteria that would begin in 2014 in its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking scheduled for publication in February 2012, followed by the adoption of a Final Rule in June 2012.

Eligible hospitals are also benefiting from the extension. Eligible hospitals would begin Stage 2 attestation on Oct. 31, 2013, while eligible professionals in ambulatory practice settings would begin Stage 2 on Jan. 1, 2014 under current guidelines.

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One customer at a time.