

**OCR Releases New HIPAA Proposed Rule Focused on Cybersecurity.** The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has released a proposed rule that seeks to improve cybersecurity and better protect the health care system from cyberattacks. The proposed rule would modify the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Security Rule to require HIPAA covered entities (health plans, clearinghouses, and most providers) and their business associates to strengthen cybersecurity measures for protected health information (PHI) against both external and internal threats.

OCR proposes to modify the HIPAA Security Rule by clarifying and providing more specific instruction regarding what covered entities and their business associates must do to protect the security of electronic PHI. The proposal also would require that policies and procedures be in writing, reviewed, tested, and updated on a regular basis. Additionally, it seeks to align the Security Rule with modern best practices in cybersecurity. According to the agency, the proposed rule will address: (i) Changes in the environment in which health care is provided; (ii) Significant increases in breaches and cyberattacks; (iii) Common deficiencies OCR has observed in investigations into Security Rule compliance by covered entities and their business associates; (iv) Other cybersecurity guidelines, best practices, methodologies, procedures, and processes; and (v) Court decisions that affect enforcement of the Security Rule. Go [here](#) to access the proposed rule in the Federal Register and [here](#) to review the OCR fact sheet.

**Year End Congressional Package Includes Short-Term Telehealth Extension.**

President Joe Biden signed into law a spending bill that averted a government shutdown and extended telehealth flexibilities. The American Relief Act ([H.R. 10545](#)) includes extension of the Medicare telehealth flexibilities and the Acute Hospital Care at Home (AHCAH) program through March 31, 2025. Removed from the final bill was a provision to prevent the 2.8% Medicare pay cut to physicians.

**OCR Releases 2024 Recap Video.** OCR released a video recap of its 2024 activity. The video features OCR Director Melanie Fontes-Ranier for Civil Rights Director Melanie Fontes Rainer reflecting on the agency's 2024 accomplishments. The Director discusses developing, implementing, and enforcing laws and regulations advancing civil rights, health privacy, and security. Go [here](#) to view the video.

**Epic QHIN Announces it has Connected More than 600 Hospitals.** Epic, the health care software vendor, [announced](#) that its Epic Nexus, a Trusted Exchange Framework and the Common Agreement (TEFCA) Qualified Health Information Network (QHIN), has connected 625 hospitals since going live in December 2023. Established under the bipartisan 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act, TEFCA is a nationwide framework for secure medical records exchange. Epic expects to move all its customers into TEFCA by the end of 2025.

**NUCC Releases Updated Provider Taxonomy Code Set.** The National Uniform Claim Committee (NUCC) has released its semi-annual update to the Health Care Provider Taxonomy code set, which will go into effect on April 1, 2025. The NUCC is a voluntary organization of health care industry stakeholders representing providers, payers,

designated standards maintenance organizations, public health organizations, and vendors.

The Health Care Provider Taxonomy code set is maintained by the NUCC. The complete code set is available [here](#). New codes are listed in the “New Codes” tab and changes to existing codes are listed in the “Modifications” tab under the Code Sets and Provider Taxonomy headings on the NUCC website. Go [here](#) for additional information about the NUCC.

**CMS Opens 2024 MIPS Data Submission.** The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) opened data submission for Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) eligible clinicians who participated in the 2024 performance year of the Quality Payment Program (QPP). Data can be submitted and updated until March 31, 2025.

To sign in and submit data, clinicians will need a Health Care Quality Information Systems (HCQIS) Access Roles and Profile (HARP) account and a QPP role. For help enrolling with HARP, please refer to “Step 1. Register for a HARP Account” in the [Quality Payment Program Access User Guide \(ZIP, 4MB\)](#). For help obtaining a QPP role, please refer to “Step 2a. Connect to an Organization” in the [Quality Payment Program Access User Guide \(ZIP, 4MB\)](#). CMS encourages all users with an existing HARP account to [sign in to the QPP website](#) now to ensure they do not lose access.

Clinicians who are unsure about their eligibility to participate in MIPS for the 2024 performance year can check their final eligibility status using the [QPP Participation Status Tool](#). Clinicians and groups that are opt-in eligible must make an election to opt-in or voluntarily report before they can submit data. (No election is required for opt-in eligible clinicians and groups that don’t want to participate in MIPS. Go [here](#) to access the QPP sign in page.

**CMS Innovation Center Releases Report to Congress.** CMS published the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation’s (the CMS Innovation Center) [2024 Report to Congress](#). During the period of report, more than 192,000 providers and/or plans participated in CMS Innovation Center models and initiatives, serving more than 57 million beneficiaries. This seventh report features strategic accomplishments, updates on 37 models and initiatives (including 9 newly announced models), 52 evaluations, and more activities from October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2024. Also, new to this year’s report is an introduction from Center Director Dr. Liz Fowler and an infographic of Center highlights.

**CMS Infographic Highlights Medicare Beneficiary Internet Access and Use.** CMS released an [infographic](#) highlighting information on internet access and use among people with Medicare by metropolitan residence status. CMS also released updated [data](#) on internet access and use among people with Medicare, with data for 2023, and an annual data update on [socio-demographic and health characteristics](#) of people with Medicare by metropolitan residence status, with data for 2022.