

## **Next Generation ACO Model Voluntary Alignment Frequently Asked Questions**

Some Medicare beneficiaries may have recently received a letter and form in the mail or from their doctor asking them to confirm their main doctor or doctor's office. These letters and forms are associated with a new Medicare initiative called the Next Generation Accountable Care Organization (ACO) Model. Organizations participating in this initiative are called Next Generation ACOs. Completion of the form is optional and will not affect your Medicare benefits. Even if you don't complete the form, your Medicare benefits will not change and you can continue to see any doctor or other health care provider that accepts Medicare.

*For more information or for resources available to answer your questions, please refer to the end of this document.*

### **Q1. What is this letter? What does it mean for me?**

This letter explains that your doctor or the group practice where you receive care is participating in a Next Generation ACO,<sup>1</sup> a new program where health care providers who share a common vision of improving patient care can work together more effectively. You are receiving this letter and attached form because your health care provider thinks that you might benefit from care coordination and preventive services offered by the Next Generation ACO. Whether or not you choose to complete the form, your benefits do not change and you can continue to receive care from any doctor, hospital, or other health care providers that accepts Medicare.

### **Q2. What is an Accountable Care Organization (ACO)?**

Accountable Care Organizations, or ACOs, are groups of doctors, hospitals, and other health care professionals, who come together voluntarily to give coordinated high quality care to the Medicare patients they serve. Coordinated care may include talking with your different medical providers to manage your medications and may also include providing you with certain preventive care services. ACO services vary but can include providing transportation for doctor appointments or providing you with a list of resources in your community where you can get other services you may want or need.

### **Q3. Why does the letter refer to an organization I've never heard of?**

The name of the Next Generation ACO is the name of the entity that works with a number of different participating medical providers, such as a primary care practice, a hospital, a specialist,

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<sup>1</sup> For more information regarding ACOs, see the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) publication *Medicare and You*, p. 146-147 (2016), available at <https://www.medicare.gov/Pubs/pdf/10050.pdf>

a pharmacy, and other Medicare-enrolled providers to provide care for patients. You may be familiar with the doctor participating in the Next Generation ACO, but not with the name of the Next Generation ACO itself. If you have questions about the Next Generation ACO listed on your letter and form, you may call their number that is provided in the letter.

**Q4. Are you trying to sell me something? What does this cost me?**

No, we are not selling anything. There is no cost to you as a result of your doctor's participation in a Next Generation ACO and no change to your Medicare benefits. Your Medicare benefits will remain the same and you will continue to have access to any Medicare participating provider.

**Q5. Is Medicare changing my doctor?**

No. Receiving or signing the form does not affect your Medicare benefits in any way. Medicare is not changing your doctor and you can still see any doctor you choose that accepts Medicare. Completing the form is meant to help your doctor better coordinate your care.

**Q6. The group practice listed on the form is incorrect. What should I do?**

If the doctor or group practice listed on the form is not your main doctor, do not sign the form. Not completing the form will not change your existing benefits and you will continue to receive your medical services at your current group practice. You may contact the Next Generation ACO (using the phone number provided in the letter) to request a corrected form with the name of your main doctor or group practice.

**Q7. My neighbor, friend, spouse, family member, etc. and I have the same doctor but did not receive the form? Can they get the letter too? How?**

Any Original Medicare beneficiary may request a form by contacting the Next Generation ACO or at their next doctor's visit. Please share the Next Generation ACO's contact information with your neighbor, friend, spouse, family member, etc. if they are interested in receiving a form.

**Q8. What happens if I don't fill out the form?**

The form is optional. If you choose to complete the form or if you choose not to complete the form, your Medicare benefits will not change in any way and you can still see any doctor of your choosing.

**Q9. How can I change my decision after I've completed the form?**

If after completing the form, you change your mind about whether you will want to receive medical care from the doctor or group practice listed on the form, you can contact the Next Generation ACO using the phone number on the letter that accompanied the form to reverse your previous decision.

### **Q10. Are these letters and forms legitimate?**

Yes, both the letter and form you received from your doctor or from a Next Generation ACO are legitimate Medicare documents and part of an ongoing Medicare initiative. You can contact 1-800-MEDICARE for additional information. Also, if you have any concerns, suggestions, or comments to share, please contact the CMS Next Generation team at:

[NextGenerationACOModel@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:NextGenerationACOModel@cms.hhs.gov).

### **Q11. Can I still see my specialist at another group and can I still go to my preferred hospital?**

You will still have the right to receive care from any doctor or hospital that accepts Medicare. Your doctors will continue to recommend specialists and hospitals for your specific health needs. One of the goals of this program is to improve coordination of care, which Next Generation ACOs are best able to do when patients receive care from a doctor or group practice associated with the ACO.

### **Q12. What does this mean for my care while I am in a location other than my area of residence?**

You will still have the right to receive care from any doctor or hospital that accepts Medicare.

### **Q13. What if I don't want to be in the Next Generation ACO?**

You can choose to not be voluntarily aligned to an ACO by not signing this form. Even if you do not sign the form, you may still be included in an ACO if you receive primary care from a doctor participating in an ACO. However you may elect to not have your personal identifiable medical information shared with an ACO through the data opt-out process. For more information on this process and/or to obtain a data opt-out form please contact 1-800-MEDICARE.

### **Q14. What does the Next Generation ACO do with my health information? Who will see it?**

The only information that Medicare will send to the ACO is from the bills that it received for your care in the past three years and going forward. This does not include doctors' notes or images.

Those who are involved in your treatment will see your information to identify risks for hospital admission, to enroll you, if needed, in a care management program or to reach out to you for screenings, vaccinations, or health education. The information the ACO receives will also help it to design programs that will support the needs of all our Medicare patients. You may elect to not have your personal identifiable medical information shared with an ACO through the data opt-out process. For more information on this process and/or to obtain a data opt-out form please contact 1-800-MEDICARE.

### **Q15. How will Medicare ensure quality of care?**

As a Medicare ACO, the ACO will be required to meet robust quality standards based upon, among other measures, patient outcomes and care coordination among the provider team. ACO performance on these measures are publicly posted on the CMS website.

### **Q16. Where can I find out more information about ACOs, the Next Generation ACO Model, and the voluntary alignment initiative?**

If you have any further questions about ACOs you may ask your doctor, contact the ACO by using the phone number on the letter that accompanied the form, contact your local State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), or call Medicare at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). TTY users should call 1-877-486-2048. You can also get more information online at the websites below:

CMS Website:

<http://www.medicare.gov/acos.html>

Next Generation ACO Model and Voluntary Alignment:

<https://innovation.cms.gov/initiatives/Next-Generation-ACO-Model/>

To find contact information for your local State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) visit:

<https://www.shiptacenter.org/>

You can find this information at the back of your *Medicare and You 2016 Handbook* as well.

### **Q17. Who do I contact if I suspect fraud or abuse?**

Contact your local Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Program to report suspected Medicare fraud and abuse. There is an SMP Program in every state. The SMP Program educates and empowers people with Medicare to take an active role in detecting and preventing health care fraud and abuse. The SMP Program not only protects people with Medicare, it also helps preserve Medicare. You can also contact your local SMP Program to get personalized counseling, find out about community events in your area, or volunteer. For more information or to find your local SMP Program, visit <http://www.smpresource.org/>