



TEXAS ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES HEALTH AND EMPLOYEE BENEFITS POOL

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

I.

USE AND DISCLOSURE OF HEALTH INFORMATION

The Texas Association of Counties Health and Employee Benefits Pool ("Pool") has created a health plan that provides health coverages for employees (and their dependents) of the counties and county-related entities that are members of the Pool ("the Plan"). The Plan is subject to the requirements of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("HIPAA") and the Privacy Rule published by the United States Department of Health and Human Services at 45 CFR §§ 160 - 164 ("Privacy Rule"). HIPAA and the Rule regulate the Plan's use of your protected health information.

The Plan may use your protected health information for purposes of making or obtaining payment for your care and conducting health care operations. The Plan has established a policy to guard against unnecessary disclosure of your health information.

THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH AND PURPOSES FOR WHICH YOUR HEALTH INFORMATION MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED WITHOUT GETTING AN AUTHORIZATION FROM YOU OR GIVING YOU A CHANCE TO AGREE OR OBJECT TO THE DISCLOSURE:

A. To Make or Obtain Payment.

The Plan may use or disclose your health information to make payment to or collect payment from third parties, such as other health plans or providers, for the care you receive. For example, the Plan may provide information regarding your coverage or health care treatment to other health plans to coordinate payment of benefits.

B. To Conduct Health Care Operations.

The Plan may use or disclose health information for its own health care operations, to facilitate the administration of the Plan, and as necessary to provide coverage and services to all of the Plan's participants. If the Plan needs to use your information, but does not need to disclose it to third parties, it will be used but will not be disclosed. Health care operations includes such activities as:

- Quality assessment and improvement activities.
- Activities designed to improve health or reduce health care costs.
- Clinical guideline and protocol development, case management and care coordination.
- Contacting health care providers and participants with information about treatment alternatives and other related functions.
- Health care professional competence or qualifications review and performance evaluation.
- Accreditation, certification, licensing or similar activities.
- Underwriting, premium rating or related functions to create, renew or replace health insurance or health benefits.
- Review and auditing, including compliance reviews, medical reviews, legal services and compliance programs.
- Business planning and development, including cost management and planning related analyses and formulary development.
- Business management and general administrative activities of the Plan, including customer service and resolution of internal grievances.

For example, the Plan may use your health information to conduct case management reviews, to review and assess the quality of the various components of the Plan and the utilized health care providers, or to engage in customer service and grievance resolution activities.

C. For Treatment Alternatives.

The Plan may use and disclose your health information to tell you about or recommend possible treatment options or alternatives that may be of interest to you.

D. For Distribution of Health-Related Benefits and Services.

The Plan may use or disclose your health information to provide to you information on health-related benefits and services that may be of interest to you.

E. For Disclosure to the Plan Sponsor.

The Plan may provide summary health information to the plan sponsor so that the plan sponsor may solicit premium bids from health insurers or modify, amend or terminate the plan. The Plan also may disclose to the plan sponsor information on whether you are participating in the health plan.

In addition, the Plan may disclose your protected health information (PHI) to the plan sponsor as necessary for the plan sponsor to perform administration functions on behalf of the Plan. The Plan will not provide your name in connection with your health information and will otherwise de-identify the information to the extent it is practical to do so. PHI will be disclosed to the plan sponsor only upon receipt of a certification by the plan sponsor that the plan sponsor agrees to:

- Not use or further disclose the information other than as permitted or required by the plan documents or as required by law;
- Ensure that any agents to whom it provides PHI received from HEBP agree to the same restrictions that apply to the plan sponsor with respect to such information;
- Not use or disclose the information for employment related actions and decisions or in connection with any other benefit or employee benefit plan of the plan sponsor;
- Report to HEBP any use or disclosure of PHI that is inconsistent with the uses or disclosures provided for of which it becomes aware;
- Make available PHI for amendment and incorporate any amendments to PHI agreed to or required by HEBP;
- Make PHI available to an individual who has a right to access it pursuant to the Privacy Rule;
- Make available the information required to provide an accounting of disclosures in accordance with the Privacy Rule;
- Make its internal practices, books, and records relating to the use and disclosure of PHI received from HEBP available to the Secretary for purposes of determining compliance by HEBP with the Privacy Rule; and
- If feasible, return or destroy all PHI received from HEBP that the sponsor still maintains in any form and retain no copies of such information when no longer needed for the purpose for which the disclosure was made; and

Any PHI disclosed by the Plan will be disclosed to the Pool Coordinator designated by the Plan Sponsor. The Plan Sponsor will restrict access to and use of PHI to those individuals who need it to perform plan administration functions or to obtain bids for health coverage. The plan sponsor will provide an effective mechanism for resolving any issues if such persons use or disclose your PHI inappropriately.

F. When Legally Required.

The Plan will disclose your health information when it is required to do so by any federal, state or local law.

G. To Conduct Health Oversight Activities.

The Plan may disclose your health information to a health oversight agency for authorized activities including audits, civil administrative or criminal investigations, inspections, licensure or disciplinary action. The Plan, however, may not disclose your health information if you are the subject of an investigation and the investigation does not arise out of or is not directly related to your receipt of health care or public benefits.

H. In Connection With Judicial and Administrative Proceedings.

The Plan may disclose your health information in the course of any judicial or administrative proceeding in response to an order of a court or administrative tribunal as expressly authorized by such order or in response to a subpoena, discovery request or other lawful process, but only when the Plan makes reasonable efforts to either notify you about the request or to obtain an order protecting your health information.

I. For Law Enforcement Purposes.

As permitted or required by state law, the Plan may disclose your protected health information to a law enforcement official for certain law enforcement purposes, including, but not limited to, if the Plan has a suspicion that your death was the result of criminal conduct or in an emergency to report a crime.

J. In the Event of a Serious Threat to Health or Safety.

The Plan may, consistent with applicable law and ethical standards of conduct, disclose your protected health information if the Plan, in good faith, believes that such disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to your health or safety or to the health and safety of the public.

K. For Specialized Government Functions.

We may be required to disclose your information to federal authorities. Federal regulations require the Plan to use or disclose your health information to facilitate specified government functions related to the military and veterans, national security and intelligence activities, protective services for the president and others, and correctional institutions and inmates.

L. For Worker's Compensation.

The Plan may release your health information to the extent necessary to comply with laws related to workers' compensation or similar programs.

M. Public Health Activities.

The Plan may disclose your protected health information to a public health authority authorized by law to collect such information to prevent or control disease, injury, or disability, and to report such information as birth or death, the conduct of public health surveillance and public health investigations. The Plan also may disclose your information to an appropriate government authority authorized to receive reports about child abuse. The Plan also may disclose your information to a person responsible for activities related to the quality, safety and effectiveness of products regulated by the federal Food and Drug Administration. The Plan may disclose your protected health information to a government authority if there is a reasonable belief that you are a victim of abuse, neglect, or domestic violence.

II.

AUTHORIZATION TO USE OR DISCLOSE HEALTH INFORMATION

Other than as stated above, the Plan will not disclose your health information unless you give us your written authorization. If you authorize the Plan to use or disclose your health information, you may revoke that authorization in writing at any time, unless the Plan has taken an action based on your authorization.

III.

YOUR RIGHTS WITH RESPECT TO YOUR HEALTH INFORMATION

You have the following rights regarding your health information that the Plan maintains:

A. Right to Request Restrictions.

You may request restrictions on certain uses and disclosures of your health information. You have the right to request a limit on the Plan's disclosure of your health information to someone involved in the payment of your care. The Plan is not required to agree to your request, but will certainly consider it. If you wish to make a request for restrictions, please contact TAC HEBP Program Manager at 800-456-5974.

B. Right to Receive Confidential Communications.

You have the right to request that the Plan communicate with you in a certain way if you feel it is necessary to protect your interests. For example, you may ask that the Plan only communicate with you at a certain telephone number or by e-mail. If you wish to receive confidential communications, please make your request in writing to TAC HEBP Program Manager, P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, Fax 512-481-8481. The Plan will honor your reasonable requests for confidential communications.

C. Right to Inspect and Copy Your Health Information.

You have the right to inspect and copy your health information. A request to inspect and copy records containing your health information must be made in writing to TAC HEBP Program Manager, P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, Fax 512-481-8481. If you request a copy of your health information, the Plan may charge a reasonable fee for copying, assembling costs and postage, if applicable, associated with your request.

D. Right to Amend Your Health Information.

If you believe that your health information records are inaccurate or incomplete, you may request that the Plan amend any records in its possession. A request for an amendment of records must be made in writing, must express a reason the records should be amended, and must be sent to TAC HEBP Program Manager, P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, Fax 512-481-8481. The Plan may deny the request if it does not include a reason to support the amendment. The request also may be denied if your health information records were not created by the Plan, if the information requested is not part of a designated record set, if the health information you are requesting to amend is not part of the Plan's records, if the health information you wish to amend falls within an exception to the health information you are permitted to inspect and copy (including psychotherapy notes, and information compiled for or in anticipation of a civil, criminal or administrative proceeding), or if the Plan determines the records containing your health information are accurate and complete.

E. Right to an Accounting.

The Privacy Rule requires the Plan to keep a record of certain disclosures of health information, such as disclosures for public purposes authorized by law or disclosures that are not in accordance with the Plan's privacy policies and applicable law. You have the right to request a copy of this record. The request must be made in writing to TAC HEBP Program Manager, P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, Fax 512-481-8481. The request should specify the time period for which you are requesting the information, but may not start earlier than April 14, 2003. Accounting requests may not be made for periods of time going back more than six (6) years. The Plan will provide the first accounting you request during any 12-month period without charge. Subsequent accounting requests may be subject to a reasonable cost-based fee. The Plan will inform you in advance of the fee, if applicable.

F. Right to a Paper Copy of this Notice.

You have a right to request and receive a paper copy of this Notice at any time, even if you have received this Notice previously or agreed to receive the Notice electronically. To obtain a paper copy, please contact TAC HEBP Program Manager, P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, Fax 512-481-8481. You also may view a copy of the current version of the Plan's Privacy Notice at the Web site, <http://www.County.Org>.

IV.
DUTIES OF TAC HEBP HEALTH PLAN

The Plan is required by law to maintain the privacy of your health information as set forth in this Notice and to provide to you this Notice of its duties and privacy practices. The Plan is required to abide by the terms of this Notice, which may be amended from time to time. The Plan reserves the right to change the terms of this Notice and to make the new Notice provisions effective for all health information that it maintains. If the Plan changes its policies and procedures, the Plan will revise the Notice and will provide a copy of the revised Notice to you within 60 days of the change. You have the right to express complaints to the Plan and to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services if you believe that your privacy rights have been violated. Any complaints to the Plan should be made in writing to TAC HEBP Privacy Official, Jim Jean, P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, Fax: 512-478-1426. The Plan encourages you to express any concerns you may have regarding the privacy of your information. You will not be retaliated against in any way for filing a complaint.

CONTACT PERSON

The Plan has designated Jim Jean, Privacy Official as its contact person for all issues regarding patient privacy and your privacy rights. You may contact him at P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, 512-478-8753.

EFFECTIVE DATE

This Notice is effective April 14, 2003.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS NOTICE, PLEASE CONTACT Jim Jean, TAC HEBP Privacy Official, P.O. Box 2131, Austin, Texas 78768, 512-478-8753.