

GOVERNMENT HEALTH IT

CMS offers small practices health IT incentives

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Small-to-midsize physician practices might be eligible for a new incentive program sponsored by federal and state health agencies that aims to drive the adoption of electronic health records.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, collaborating with regional health care groups, will offer incentives totaling up to \$58,000 per physician over five years or \$290,000 per practice over five years. To be eligible, a practice must focus on primary care, have 20 or fewer physicians, serve as the main source of primary care for a least 50 fee-for-service Medicare beneficiaries, and agree to install an EHR by the end of the incentive program's second year.

The program calls for the deployment of EHR systems certified by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology (CCHIT). Maryland/District of Columbia, Pittsburgh, Louisiana, and South Dakota are embarking on the program this year, with eight additional regions to follow.

Three organizations lead the incentive effort in Maryland/DC: the Maryland Health Care Commission, MedChi-The Maryland State Medical Society, and the D.C. Medical Society. In addition, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield promotes the program to its network of physician providers.

Physicians have until Nov. 26 to submit an application for the incentive, according to an update provided by the Maryland/D.C. organizations directing the regional incentive program. CMS, as of October, has received 18 applications, the organizations reported.

The Maryland Health Care Commission has developed a product portfolio that provides physicians with information from 23 CCHIT-certified EHR vendors, which have agreed to offer product discounts to physicians.

In Maryland/D.C. and the other regions, CMS aims to recruit 200 practices and conduct the program as a research project. Half the practices recruited will be eligible for the financial incentives while the other half will serve as a control group. The practices will be assigned randomly.

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