

MA & PDP CAHPS SURVEY WEBCAST

Mail Survey Formatting Requirements and Enhancements Script

Slide 1 – Mail Survey Formatting Requirements and Enhancements

Welcome to the first episode of the Medicare Advantage and Prescription Drug Plan CAHPS (hereafter referred to as MA & PDP CAHPS) webcast series. These webcasts cover topics of interest to vendors who administer the survey and health plan staff who use the data collected by the survey. This webcast will cover Mail Survey Formatting Requirements and Enhancements.

Slide 2 – Overview

The MA & PDP CAHPS Survey includes three survey versions to measure beneficiary experience with Medicare Advantage and Prescription Drug Plans: MA-Only, MA-PD and PDP. Survey administration uses a mixed-mode protocol in which mail is the primary mode of administration. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, provides mail survey templates for each questionnaire to promote standardization in survey administration. This webcast will describe the formatting specifications required by CMS, as well as options for customizing the surveys, and tips for a respondent friendly format, with a goal of maximizing response rates. These tips are based on the respondent friendly questionnaire design principles developed and tested by Don Dillman, PhD, a major contributor to the development of modern mail, telephone and internet survey methods, and analysis of CAHPS survey formats conducted by the MA & PDP CAHPS project team. Examples of these formats will be provided, including the placement of survey instructions and ways in which the survey template can be customized. We'll include a list of references later in the webcast for those who would like to explore this topic in greater detail.

Slide 3 – Required Formatting Specifications (1 of 4)

Survey vendors are required to follow formatting specifications for their mail surveys, described in detail in the Data Collection Protocol chapter of the MA & PDP CAHPS Quality Assurance Protocols and Technical Specifications manual. Let's start with a review of the requirements, before moving on to options to customize your MA & PDP CAHPS mail survey.

- The survey title and year, for example, "2021 Medicare Experience Survey" must be displayed at the top of the first page of the survey
- All survey instructions must be printed at the top of the first page of the questionnaire
- In addition to the survey title, the first page of the survey must include the survey instructions and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) clearance statement and number
- The mail survey should not contain any direct identifiers such as the name or address of the sampled beneficiary

Slide 4 – Required Formatting Specifications (2 of 4)

The wording of survey questions and answer categories cannot be changed in any way from what appears in the mail survey template. All answer categories must be presented vertically, including the 0-10 response scale.

Each of the three MA & PDP CAHPS survey versions contains a set of Core questions and About You questions. Core questions are included in the domains: Your Healthcare in the Last Six Months, Your Personal Doctor, Getting Healthcare from Specialists, Your Health Plan, and Your Prescription Drug Plan. The About You section includes questions that help describe the beneficiaries who participate in the

survey. No changes are permitted to the order of the Core MA & PD CAHPS Survey questions or the About You questions. All questions in the CMS mail survey templates must be included in your mail survey.

The About You section always follows the Core questions. If you add supplemental questions to your MA & PDP CAHPS Survey, you must place the supplemental questions after the Core questions, and before or after the About You section.

Slide 5 – Required Formatting Specifications (3 of 4)

Mail survey questions and answer categories must be presented following the format of the mail survey templates provided by CMS. That is, response choices must be listed individually for each question, not presented in a matrix format which simply lists the answer categories across the top of the page and the questions down the side of the page. For example, when a series of questions is asked that have the same answer categories (such as Never, Sometimes, Usually, or Always), the answer categories must be repeated with every question. The only questions permitted for presentation in a matrix or grid format are those approved by CMS.

Slide 6 – Required Formatting Specifications (4 of 4)

CMS selects a sample of Medicare beneficiaries who meet specific eligibility criteria and provides each survey vendor with a sample file for their client Medicare contracts. The sample file includes a marketing name for each contract, as reported by the contract to CMS. The purpose of the contract marketing name is to help orient the beneficiary.

The contract marketing name must be printed on the back page of the mail survey. Because a contract may use multiple names in their marketing materials or to identify different plan benefit packages, survey vendors may print alternative names on the back cover of the survey to promote recognition. The list of alternative names must be preceded by the phrase, “You may also know your plan by one of the following.” The contract number is not printed on the back cover of the mail survey.

The CMS sample file also includes a unique identifier for each sampled beneficiary, called a Finder Number. Survey vendors must use a form tracking ID to link each printed mail survey to the specific Finder Number and beneficiary in the sample file. The form tracking ID is printed on the last page of each survey. In addition to tracking which printed mail survey is associated with a specific beneficiary, survey vendors must include an identifier to differentiate between the first and second survey mailing on each printed survey.

The survey vendor’s return address for mail processing appears on each printed mail survey, on the bottom of the last page containing survey questions and on the back cover of the survey, which may be the same page. This ensures mail surveys are returned to the correct address in the event the beneficiary misplaces the vendor's return envelope.

To promote readability, mail surveys must be printed using a font size no smaller than 12 points. Survey vendors have the option of using Arial or Times New Roman font styles.

Also, to promote readability, the text of a mail survey must be printed using black ink. Survey vendors have the option to print mail surveys on white or colored paper. Use of colored paper is limited to colors

that do not reduce readability, such as pastel hues. Neon or very bright colors or dark colors reduce readability and cannot be used for the MA & PDP CAHPS mail survey.

Slide 7 – Tips for Customizing the Mail Survey

Survey vendors should consider the following recommendations to ensure mail surveys are easy for respondents to read and navigate, thus increasing the likelihood of receiving a completed survey:

- Use of a two-column format on each mail survey page
- Wide margins (at least 3 quarters of an inch) so that the survey has sufficient white space to enhance readability and navigation
- A single, consistent format for answer choices, such as an oval, circle or check box

Pre-codes affect the readability of the survey. If a survey vendor prints a pre-code to the left of each answer choice, it should be a superscript or subscript so that it doesn't distract from the answer choices. A special rule is that pre-codes are never used for the 0-10 response scale.

Slide 8 – Respondent Friendly Formats

The CAHPS survey instructions play an important role in the mail survey. They educate the survey respondent about the task of answering the survey questions by demonstrating the common format of survey questions and answer categories. Survey instructions also educate the survey respondent about skip instructions contained within the mail survey.

As your organization customizes the mail survey for your clients, we encourage you to place the instructions on a separate page, rather than at the top of the first page of substantive survey questions. Analysis finds that when the instructions and sample questions are placed on a separate page, there is a greater likelihood that the MA & PDP CAHPS mail survey will be completed.

Analysis also finds that judicious or selective use of color on a white mail survey page contributes to a more respondent friendly mail survey and results in a greater likelihood that the MA & PDP CAHPS mail survey will be completed. Color on the white mail survey page promotes navigation of the survey by making it easy to identify and distinguish survey sections and changes in the topic of survey questions. Color can also be used as a visual cue to help respondents navigate between questions within the mail survey.

Slide 9 – Example #1: Using Color to Identify Survey Sections

This slide provides an example of how to use color to distinguish survey sections.

Slide 10 – Example #2: Using Color as a Visual Cue

This slide provides an example of using color as a visual cue to promote navigation between questions.

Slide 11 – Example #3: Using White Space as a Visual Cue

Use of sufficient white space promotes a respondent friendly design to clearly separate survey questions from survey responses and one survey question from the next. This slide provides examples of a respondent friendly use of white space and a less readable version with insufficient white space separating questions and responses.

Slide 12 – Summary

This webcast has described the required MA & PDP CAHPS questionnaire formatting specifications, as well as customization recommendations designed to promote response. Using the CMS mail survey formatting protocols and utilizing the principles of respondent friendly design can aid contracts and vendors in increasing their response rates.

Slide 13 – References

This slide provides reference material for anyone interested in exploring additional detail on this topic.

Slide 14 – Contact Us

Thank you for listening to this webcast on MA & PDP CAHPS Mail Survey Formatting and Enhancements.

Please contact MA & PDP CAHPS technical assistance at MA-PDPCAHP@hsag.com or 1-877-735-8882 for any questions. For more information about the MA & PDP CAHPS survey, you can visit the MA & PDP CAHPS website at: www.ma-pdpcahps.org.