Doctors get chance to report late on use of COVID-19 relief funds

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What’s the news: Due largely to AMA and specialty society advocacy, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has decided to reopen reporting for physicians who got more than $10,000 in COVID-19 assistance from the Provider Relief Fund before July 1, 2020, known as “Period 1.” About 16,000 recipients have not completed the Period 1 reporting, HRSA officials told the AMA. Doctors who missed the Nov. 31, 2021 reporting deadline have until April 22, 10:59 p.m. CDT, to submit a late Reporting Period 1 request due to extenuating circumstances such as severe illness or death, natural disaster impact or communications errors. A physician must choose and attest to an extenuating circumstance that prevented compliance with the original reporting deadline, but no supporting document or proof is required. Affected physicians should fill out this HRSA “request to report late” form.

Physician practices should get information about how to submit a request directly from HRSA via email. If a physician did not submit a Period 1 report and does not hear from HRSA, they may initiate communication by calling (866) 569-3522. Check out this AMA guide to the PRF late-reporting workflow (PDF) that walks you through the process step by step, which has been posted to the COVID-19 resource center for physicians.

If HRSA approves the extenuating circumstances form, the doctor will get a notification to proceed with completing the Period 1 report soon after. Physicians will have 10 days from the notification receipt date to submit the late Period 1 report in the Provider Relief Fund (PRF) Reporting Portal. Physicians who didn’t submit a Period 1 report and do not hear from HRSA subsequently can call (866) 569-3522. Physicians who have not yet registered in the PRF Reporting Portal should do so now in preparation for the late-reporting period.

Why it’s important: In a March 31 letter to HRSA (PDF), the AMA and 31 national medical specialty societies noted that small and rural physician practices appeared to be particularly affected by the

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potential recoupment, and that physician practices were unaware of the deadline.

“These practices, often under-resourced even while they provide critical health care services, cannot afford to have the funds they received recouped,” says the letter from the AMA and other physician organizations to HRSA Administrator Carole Johnson.

“During the late fall when the Delta variant was surging, these physician practices and others were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 surges in many ways that may have prevented or delayed the required reporting.”

For example, some practices said they weren’t contacted about the requirement to report and were thus unaware of the deadline. In some cases, medical administrative staff contracted COVID-19 or were acting as a caregiver to someone who did, and so were out of the office, causing the practice to miss the reporting deadline. Staffing challenges and turnover exacerbated the pandemic also resulted in practices’ point of contact no longer being affiliated with the practice.

“We are hearing,” says the physician organizations’ letter, “that the practices out of compliance simply did not know about the requirement to report.”

The AMA will continue to advocate for greater flexibility and more information to ensure physician practices have an adequate opportunity to come into compliance.

Learn more: For all other questions related to PRF reporting, call the Provider Support Line at (866) 569-3522; for TTY dial 711. The line is open Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–10 p.m. CST, but those hours are subject to change.

Check out the AMA’s newly updated physician guide to keeping your practice open.

Stay current with the latest news on the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccines and variants, and reliable information directly from experts and physician leaders with the “AMA COVID-19 Update.” Catch every episode by subscribing to the AMA’s YouTube channel or the audio-only podcast version.