

## National Provider Identifier Number – The What, Why and How

The National Provider Identifier (NPI) is a unique 10-digit HIPAA identifier issued to health care providers and organizations by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The purpose of the NPI number is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of electronic transmission of health information, and its use is required for financial transactions related to the provision of health care services.

VDHA advocates for every licensed dental hygienist to make the one time application to obtain their free NPI number. There are short term and longer term benefits for hygienists obtaining this identifier number. In the short term, because the use of this identifier number specifically tracks the services of dental hygienists, it will allow for increased data collection across the Commonwealth, tracking which provider category provided what services either in a public health or private office setting, when Medicaid is billed. It also prepares our profession for continued expansion of professional opportunities, as we look forward to expanding our settings and business opportunities. In the case of dental hygienists not registering for an NPI, their services will not be collected by the federal data systems, thereby limiting recognition of the dental hygiene profession, its workforce efforts and impact.

Obtaining your NPI number may or may not change the way that your employer bills for your services. If you are employed by a dentist who accepts Medicaid, s/he may bill for the services you provide using your NPI number. The Medicaid dentist (or business or clinic) will still directly receive the reimbursable amount for the services provided. If you are working in a non-Medicaid office, your employer has the option to use your NPI number for third party/private payer claims for the services you provide.

Currently, Virginia has not credentialed dental hygienists in the Medicaid provider system; however nineteen states have. With special attention on changes in the remote supervision laws as well as the expanded use of teledentistry, direct reimbursement is a critical piece of the puzzle to assure maximizing the utilization of the dental hygienist, especially when targeting the underserved populations in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Having broad NPI status within the dental hygiene profession facilitates development of workforce models that increase direct access to the services of a licensed dental hygienist, including our role in a more integrated health system.

The linked ADHA Access article provides additional information.

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