



Program Assistance Letter

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TO: Health Center Program Grantees
Primary Care Associations
Primary Care Offices
National Cooperative Agreements

I. PURPOSE

This Program Assistance Letter (PAL) supersedes both Program Information Notice 2007-17 (PIN 2007-17) and its amendment, PAL 2009-01. This PAL describes the accrediting organizations that are contracted to provide surveys and educational services under the Accreditation Initiative Program for the new three-year contract period (October 2009 – September 2012). Furthermore, this PAL outlines the processes and requirements for applying for accreditation and highlights the broad array of technical supports that are available under the Accreditation Initiative.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) encourages and supports health centers to undergo rigorous and comprehensive survey processes and achieve national benchmarks that demonstrate the highest standards of health care quality. Survey status received from an independent review body, such as accreditation, represents a visible demonstration to patients and the community that the health center or organization is committed to providing high quality health care services. The Accreditation Initiative supports the Health Center Program in its ability to demonstrate the culture of quality and safety within health centers, with a specific focus on quality improvement, quality assurance, risk management, and performance improvement.

The Accreditation Initiative provides services through a multi-vendor contract with two national accrediting organizations:

- The Accreditation Association of Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC)
- The Joint Commission (TJC), formerly known as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations.

The current three-year contract provides for survey accreditation services for ambulatory care, behavioral health care, laboratory services, and technical assistance and training for health centers.

Entities eligible to receive survey accreditation services under the Accreditation Initiative (“health centers”) are organizations receiving funding under the Health Center Program authorized in section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254b), as amended, specifically:

- Community Health Center (CHC) Programs, funded under section 330(e);
- Migrant Health Center (MHC) Programs, funded under section 330(g);
- Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) Programs, funded under 330(h); and
- Public Housing Primary Care (PHCP) Programs, funded under 330(i).

However, to promote quality improvement across all organizations affiliated with BPHC programs, the Accreditation Initiative is structured to allow for broad accessibility to survey-related education, training, and technical assistance resources.

III. INITIAL SURVEY AND RESOURCES FOR PRE-SURVEY PREPARATION

Health centers are encouraged to factor into the planning process a minimum of six months preparation time for an initial accreditation survey; designate a lead person responsible for accreditation preparation; and undergo a self-assessment comparing the accrediting organization’s standards against the health center’s internal processes and practices.

The surveying organizations have resources to assess the critical areas necessary for achieving positive survey outcomes, as well as, readiness materials to guide health centers through the survey process. AAAHC will conduct mock surveys or provide pre-survey assessments and TJC through its affiliate, Joint Commission Resources (JCR), will offer mock surveys to assist grantees with preparation for initial accreditation surveys.

Organizations interested in HRSA support for initial survey and pre-survey resources under the Accreditation Initiative must complete the Accreditation Initiative Notice of Interest (NOI) located at <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/policy/pal0912/AccreditationNOIform.pdf>. The completed NOI must be submitted via email to accreditationinitiative@hrsa.gov.

After a health center is approved by HRSA for their initial survey or pre-survey, AAAHC or TJC will send additional resources on the survey process to the grantee, including, but not limited to:

- The organization’s most current Accreditation Manual or Handbook;
- Access to the organization’s support and resources for accreditation;
- Details regarding the application for accreditation process; and
- Instructions on how to achieve compliance with standards and prepare for your survey.

IV. ADDITIONAL SERVICES FOR ACCREDITED HEALTH CENTERS

A. HEALTH CENTER RESURVEYS

Health centers may maintain their accreditation status through resurvey. Grantees eligible for resurvey under the HRSA Accreditation Initiative will be contacted directly by AAAHC or TJC to coordinate the resurvey process. Health centers seeking resurvey are not required to submit a NOI to the Accreditation Initiative.

B. CHANGES IN SURVEY STATUS

An accredited health center that is interested in changing its existing status with one of the survey organizations will be permitted to seek status with the other accrediting organization within the Accreditation Initiative. This instance of change in status will be considered an initial survey, and as such, the health center will be required to submit the NOI.

C. LABORATORY AND BEHAVIORAL SURVEYS

Both surveying organizations provide surveys for laboratory services and/or behavioral health services. It is recognized that the timing and review cycle of a laboratory and/or behavioral health survey may differ from that of an ambulatory health care survey. If occurring in the same review cycle, the laboratory and/or behavioral health survey will be performed concurrently with an ambulatory health care survey. If occurring in alternate review cycles, the surveying organization will avert lapses in status by conducting the behavioral health and/or laboratory survey separately from the ambulatory health care survey.

Please note that the behavioral health surveys do not include reviews of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) supported opioid treatment programs.

V. TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Both accreditation survey organizations have developed a series of technical assistance and training resources that focus on strategies for obtaining/maintaining accreditation status. The accreditation survey organizations will also provide technical assistance that can support grantees with adherence to accreditation standards and pre-survey, survey, and post-survey activities. The training and educational resources that are available under the Accreditation Initiative will be made available to all grantees and other organizations affiliated with Bureau of Primary Health Care (BPHC). The resources include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Sponsored Educational and Training Sessions
- Webinars on Ambulatory Care Standards
- Group Teleconference on the benefits, obstacles, resources, and preparation steps relating to accreditation.
- Performance Improvement Technical Assistance
- Accreditation Materials and Publications

VI. CONTACTS

Additional information regarding the AAAHC survey process can be found at <http://www.aaahc.org/> or by contacting Ron Smothers, Assistant Director, AAAHC Accreditation Services by email at rsmothers@aaahc.org or by phone at (847) 853-6067.

Additional information regarding the TJC survey process can be found at <http://www.jointcommission.org/AccreditationPrograms/AmbulatoryCare/BPHC/> or by contacting Delia Constanzo, TJC Community Health Center Accreditation by email at dconstanzo@jointcommission.org or by phone at (630) 792-5011.

Additional information and resources on the Accreditation Initiative are available regarding this PAL and the NOI process should be referred to the Accreditation Initiative Program Manager at accreditationinitiative@hrsa.gov or (301) 594-0818.

Sincerely,

/s/

James Macrae
Associate Administrator for Primary Care