



The Eye Physicians and Surgeons

Pennsylvania Academy of Ophthalmology

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March 8, 2024

The Honorable Josh D. Shapiro
Governor of the Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dr. Valerie Arkoosh, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
Health & Welfare Building
625 Forster Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro and Secretary Arkoosh,

As the Pennsylvania Academy of Ophthalmology (PAO), we write to express our deep concern regarding the ongoing impact of the Change HealthCare breach on our member practices and the broader healthcare landscape in Pennsylvania. PAO represents over 600 ophthalmologists with a mission to promote safe quality eyecare and the profession of ophthalmology.

Since February 22, 2024, many of our member practices have been unable to submit claims through the Change HealthCare clearinghouse, a vital component of their operations. This disruption has severely affected their ability to provide essential eye care services to patients across the state. Given the widespread reliance on Change HealthCare within our community, the impact of this breach extends far beyond mere inconvenience—it poses a significant threat to the financial stability of our practices and the continuity of care for our patients. Many of our members will run out of money to pay bills and staff within 2 weeks.

Despite assurances of ongoing efforts to resolve the issue, the lack of communication and actionable solutions from Change HealthCare has left our practices in a state of uncertainty and financial vulnerability. The proposed payment relief program offered by Optum falls drastically short of addressing the full extent of losses, particularly for claims submitted to other insurers outside the Optum network.

The inability to submit claims electronically has not only disrupted revenue streams but has also reintroduced significant administrative burdens, such as manual insurance verification processes, which were previously streamlined through electronic interfaces. This increase in administrative overhead further strains the resources of our already overstretched practices.

For context, when a provider submits clean claims to an insurance company, they can expect to be reimbursed within 3-4 weeks. Providers have not been able to submit claims for 2 weeks. Providers who use Change HealthCare services are days away from no money coming in. The alternative clearinghouse solutions are piecemeal and paltry or practically require weeks to put in place.

Submitting claims via paper, for those insurances who allow this method, will still delay reimbursement, as many insurance companies and providers do not have the infrastructure in place to file or process large volumes of paper claims anymore.

As our members face the prospect of prolonged financial hardship and potential practice closures, we call upon *all* insurance companies to provide immediate relief to our affected practices by offering advanced payments based on historical claims paid. As done during the COVID-19 shutdown, CMS could provide an advance related to overall practice collections, not just Medicare payments. In addition to the relaxation of prior authorization and utilization management processes during this crisis, time limitations for filing claims for services that occurred during this period need to be suspended for primary and secondary claims so that once systems are up and running, delayed claims can still be processed and paid.

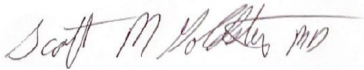
Such proactive measures would help alleviate the immediate financial strain and ensure the continued provision of essential healthcare services to patients across Pennsylvania. Again, some practices are at risk of layoffs in the next few weeks.

Furthermore, we urge state leadership to lend their support to our cause and advocate on behalf of our member practices. The unprecedented nature of this cyber breach demands a coordinated response from all stakeholders involved, including state and federal regulators, to safeguard the viability of our healthcare infrastructure.

In closing, we emphasize the urgency of the situation and implore Pennsylvania to ask insurance companies to act immediately in providing the necessary support to our member practices. The financial solvency of these practices hangs in the balance, and timely intervention is paramount to prevent further harm to patients and healthcare providers alike.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your prompt action in addressing our concerns.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Goldstein, MD
President



Sharon Taylor, MD
Chair, Legislation & Representation Committee

