



Client Alert

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DOJ and HHS Announce Creation of "HEAT" and the Expansion of Strike Force Teams

On May 20, 2009, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the formation of an interagency effort, the Health Care Fraud Prevention and Enforcement Action Team. Known as "HEAT," the effort will provide additional resources and focus in the government's fight against health care fraud, particularly fraud involving the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

HEAT will include senior officials from both DOJ and HHS. Its initial efforts will involve a focus on suppliers of durable medical equipment (DME) through increased site visits and scrutiny to prevent imposters from posing as legitimate suppliers. Other announced initiatives include training for providers on Medicare compliance, improving data sharing between the Medicare and Medicaid programs and law enforcement to identify patterns that lead to fraud, assisting state Medicaid officials with provider audits, as well as strengthening program integrity activities focused on Medicare Part C (Medicare Advantage plans) and Medicare Part D (the prescription drug benefit).

Further, HEAT will include an expansion of the joint DOJ-HHS Medicare Fraud Strike Force teams into Detroit and Houston. Two existing Strike Force teams have been operating successfully in the South Florida and Los Angeles areas since 2007. Since operating in South Florida, the Strike Force has secured \$186 million in criminal fines and civil recoveries and has convicted nearly 150 individual defendants; the Los Angeles operation has secured \$55 million in restitution to the Medicare program.

Finally, HEAT established a new website and telephone number for the reporting of Medicare and Medicaid fraud: www.hhs.gov/stopmedicarefraud and 1-800-HHS-TIPS. The DOJ and HHS urged the American public to use the website and hotline to "blow the whistle on thieves and criminals who are stealing from all of us."

The creation of HEAT is in keeping with President Obama's increased focus on health care fraud. The proposed Fiscal Year 2010 budget calls for \$311 million - a 50 percent increase - for use in Medicare and Medicaid program integrity and fraud prevention activities.

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