**How is your personal health information used?**

To administer the State of Montana health plan (plan), some employees of Health Care and Benefits Division (HCBD) and some vendors including Cigna and CareHere have limited access to our members’ private health information (PHI). The nurses and benefits specialists must have access to PHI to assist with case management and to help members with questions regarding claims.  All health care benefit plans – whether fully insured or self-funded – use PHI in this manner.

As required by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (“HIPAA”), PHI is requested and disclosed to the minimum amount necessary to accomplish the purpose of the use.  In fact, much of the time member information is used *without* identifying information.  For example, while working to measure our plan’s performance, HCBD staff may view reports that say that 37% of our members have high blood pressure.  Staff do not see who the members are who have high blood pressure.  This information is beneficial to make sure benefits are structured appropriately, and the plan stays financially sound.

Sometimes, PHI is used with identifying information.  For example, some nurses or medical personnel with Cigna and CareHere may have access to PHI in conjunction with a member name or other identifying information.  These medical personnel use this information to provide outreach to members about benefits or to perform case management.  The only people who have access to the PHI are those who are working with a member directly or who may be reaching out to a member about the benefits.

For example, if a member’s blood pressure was high, and that member entered their blood pressure reading into their health assessment, a nurse or medical professional who is working with the blood pressure management program may contact that member to let the member know about the blood pressure management program.  This outreach is intended to make sure members know about benefits that may be helpful to them.  As a member, you are not required to participate in any of the programs.  The PHI would not be shared with anyone else.

Another example would be if you call HCBD to talk with a benefits specialist about a certain claim or procedure.  That benefits specialist would be able to access your PHI related to that question in order to help you.

PHI is only used with strictest confidentiality and only as permitted by HIPAA to operate the plan and direct our benefits.

Staff members of HCBD are dedicated to protecting your personal information, above and beyond what is required by law.   Please refer to the HIPAA policy located on our website for more detailed information about HIPAA, including definitions, the plan’s use of your PHI and your rights regarding your PHI: <http://benefits.mt.gov/content/docs/HIPPA/State_of_Montana_HIPAA_Notice_updated_for_HITECH.pdf>.

We welcome any questions you may have.