

Federal Independent Dispute Resolution (IDR) Process Guidance for Certified IDR Entities

1.	General Information and Background	3
1.1	Background	3
1.2	Applicability	4
1.3	Purpose.....	5
2.	Open Negotiations	6
2.1	Initiation of Open Negotiations.....	8
2.2	Commencement of Open Negotiations	9
3.	Initiating the Federal IDR Process	9
3.1	Timeframe	9
3.2	Delivery of the Notice of Federal IDR Initiation	10
3.3	Notice Content.....	10
4.	Federal IDR Process Following Initiation: Selection of the Certified IDR Entity	11
4.1	Timeframe	11
4.2	Objection to the Initiating Party’s Selection of the Certified IDR Entity.....	11
4.3	Notice of Agreement or Failure to Agree on Selection of Certified IDR Entity.....	11
4.4	Instances When the Non-Initiating Party Believes That the Federal IDR Process Does Not Apply	12
4.5	Failure to Select a Certified IDR Entity: Random Selection by the Departments.....	12
4.6	Certified IDR Entity Responsibilities After Selection	13
4.6.1	<i>Conflicts of Interest</i>	13
4.6.2	<i>Determining Applicability of the Federal IDR Process to Dispute</i>	14
4.7	Treatment of Batched Items and Services and Bundled Payment Arrangements.....	14
4.8	Payment of Administrative Fees.....	15
5.	Payment Determination: Submission of Offers.....	15
5.1	Submission of Offers to the Certified IDR Entity	15
5.2	Federal IDR Portal	16
5.3	Payment of Certified IDR Entity Fees	16
5.4	Consequences for Failure to Submit an Offer.....	16
6.	Extension of Time Periods for Extenuating Circumstances	16
7.	Payment Determination: Selection of Offer	17

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7.1	Timeframe	17
7.2	Consideration of the QPA	17
7.2.1	<i>Definition of QPA</i>	17
7.2.2	<i>Certified IDR Entity: When and How to Apply the QPA</i>	18
7.3	Standards for Rebutting the Presumption - Credible Information and Material Difference from the QPA	19
7.4	Consideration of Information Requested by the Certified IDR Entity or Provided by Either Party Related to Either Offer	19
7.4.1	<i>Additional Information Submitted by a Party that Relates to Certain Circumstances</i>	20
7.4.2	<i>Additional Circumstances Submitted by a Party for Air Ambulance Services</i>	21
7.4.3	<i>Prohibited Factors</i>	22
8.	Written Payment Determination	23
8.1	Effect of Determination	23
9.	Recordkeeping and Reporting Requirements	25
10.	Federal IDR Process Fees.....	28
10.1	Administrative Fee.....	28
10.2	Certified IDR Entity Fee	28
10.2.1	<i>Batched Claims, Certified IDR Entity Fee, and Administrative Fee</i>	29
10.2.2	<i>Bundled Payments</i>	29
11.	Confidentiality Requirements	29
11.1	Privacy	30
11.2	Security	30
11.3	Breach Notification	31
12.	Revocation of Certification	32
12.1	Procedures after Final Revocation for Incomplete Determinations.....	32
12.2.	Certified IDR Entity and Administrative Entity Fees for Incomplete Determinations.....	32
	Appendix A– Definitions.....	33
	Appendix B – Detailed Summary of the Federal Independent Dispute Resolution (IDR) Process and Required Notices	36
	Appendix C– Resources.....	38

1. General Information and Background

1.1 Background

Effective January 1, 2022, the No Surprises Act¹ (NSA) prohibits surprise billing in certain circumstances in which surprise billing is common (see Section 1.2 for which items and services are covered). Surprise billing occurs when an individual receives an unexpected bill after obtaining items and services from an out-of-network (OON)² provider or facility or provider of air ambulance services and the individual does not have the opportunity to select a facility or provider or provider of air ambulance services covered by their health insurance network (in-network), such as during a medical emergency. In such cases, the individual's health plan often does not cover the OON charges, and the OON provider or facility or provider of air ambulance services then bills the patient for the outstanding amount (also known as balance billing). Prior to the NSA, the patient would often be responsible for paying these balance bills.

The NSA provides Federal protection for patients against surprise bills. In situations covered by the NSA, patients will be required to pay only the in-network cost-sharing amount for these services. Health plans, issuers, and Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program Carriers^{3,4} must pay the OON provider or facility or provider of air ambulance services an amount in accordance with a state All-Payer Model Agreement or specified state law, if applicable. In the absence of an applicable All-Payer Model Agreement or specified state law, the plan must make an initial payment or a denial of payment within 30 calendar days, and the OON rate is the payment amount agreed upon between the payer and the plan. If either party believes that the payment amount is not appropriate (it's either too high or too low), they have 30 business days from the date of initial payment or denial of payment to notify the other party that they would like to negotiate. Once notified, providers, facilities, or providers of air ambulance services, and health plans, may enter into a 30-business-day open negotiation period to determine an alternate payment amount. If that the open negotiation is unsuccessful, the NSA also provides for a Federal independent dispute resolution Process (Federal IDR Process) whereby a certified independent dispute resolution entity (IDR entity) will review the specifics of the case (or cases in the event of batched claims) and services received and determine the final payment amount.

On October 7, 2021, the Departments of the Treasury, Labor, and Health and Human Services (collectively, the Departments) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) published interim final rules titled, *Requirements Related to Surprise Billing; Part II*,⁵ (October 2021 interim final rules) implementing various provisions of the NSA, including the Federal IDR Process for payment determinations. The interim final rules are applicable for plan and policy

¹ Enacted as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Pub. L. 116-260).

² A provider network is a collection of the doctors, other health care providers, hospitals, and facilities that a plan contracts with to provide medical care to its members. These providers are called "network providers" or "in-network providers." A provider or facility that hasn't contracted with the plan is called an "OON provider" or "OON facility." An OON provider or facility or provider of air ambulance services is also referred to as a nonparticipating provider or facility or provider of air ambulance services.

³ The FEHB Program contracts only with health benefits carriers that offer a complete line of medical services, such as doctor's office visits, hospitalization, emergency care, prescription drug coverage, and treatment of mental conditions and substance abuse. <https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/carriers/>.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, group health plans, health insurance issuers offering group and individual coverage and FEHB carriers are all referred to as health plans or plans in this document.

⁵ Requirements Related to Surprise Billing; Part II, 86 Fed. Reg. 55980 (October 7, 2021), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-10-07/pdf/2021-21441.pdf>.

years beginning on or after January 1, 2022, except for the provisions related to IDR entity certification, which are applicable as of October 7, 2021. These interim final rules build on the July 13, 2021, [*Requirements Related to Surprise Billing: Part I*](#)⁶ (July 2021 interim final rules), which were issued to restrict surprise billing for participants, beneficiaries and enrollees of group health plans, group and individual health insurance issuers and FEHB Carriers who receive emergency care, non-emergency care from OON providers at in-network facilities, and air ambulance services from OON providers.

1.2 Applicability

The interim final rules, specifically [*Requirements Related to Surprise Billing: Part II*](#), establish a Federal IDR Process that OON providers, facilities, and providers of air ambulance services and group health plans and health insurance issuers in the group and individual market, as well as FEHB Carriers, may use following the end of an unsuccessful open negotiation period to determine the OON rate for certain services. More specifically, in situations where an All-Payer Model Agreement or specified state law does not apply, the Federal IDR Process may be used to determine the OON rate for “qualified IDR items or services,” which include:

- Emergency services;
- Certain nonemergency items and services furnished by OON providers at in-network health care facilities, as defined in Appendix A; and
- Air ambulance services furnished by OON providers of air ambulance services.

The interim final rules implementing the Federal IDR Process generally apply to group health plans and health insurance issuers offering group or individual health insurance coverage (including grandfathered health plans and issuers), and FEHB Carriers offering a health benefits plan under 5 U.S.C. 8902, with respect to plan years (in the individual market, policy years) and contract years beginning on or after January 1, 2022. In this document, unless otherwise specified, the generic term “plan” is used to refer to all such plans, issuers, and FEHB Carriers.

The interim final rules, both Parts I and II, do not apply to items and services furnished by a provider or facility or provider of air ambulance for services payable by Medicare, Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, or TRICARE, as each of these programs already has other protections in place against unanticipated medical bills.

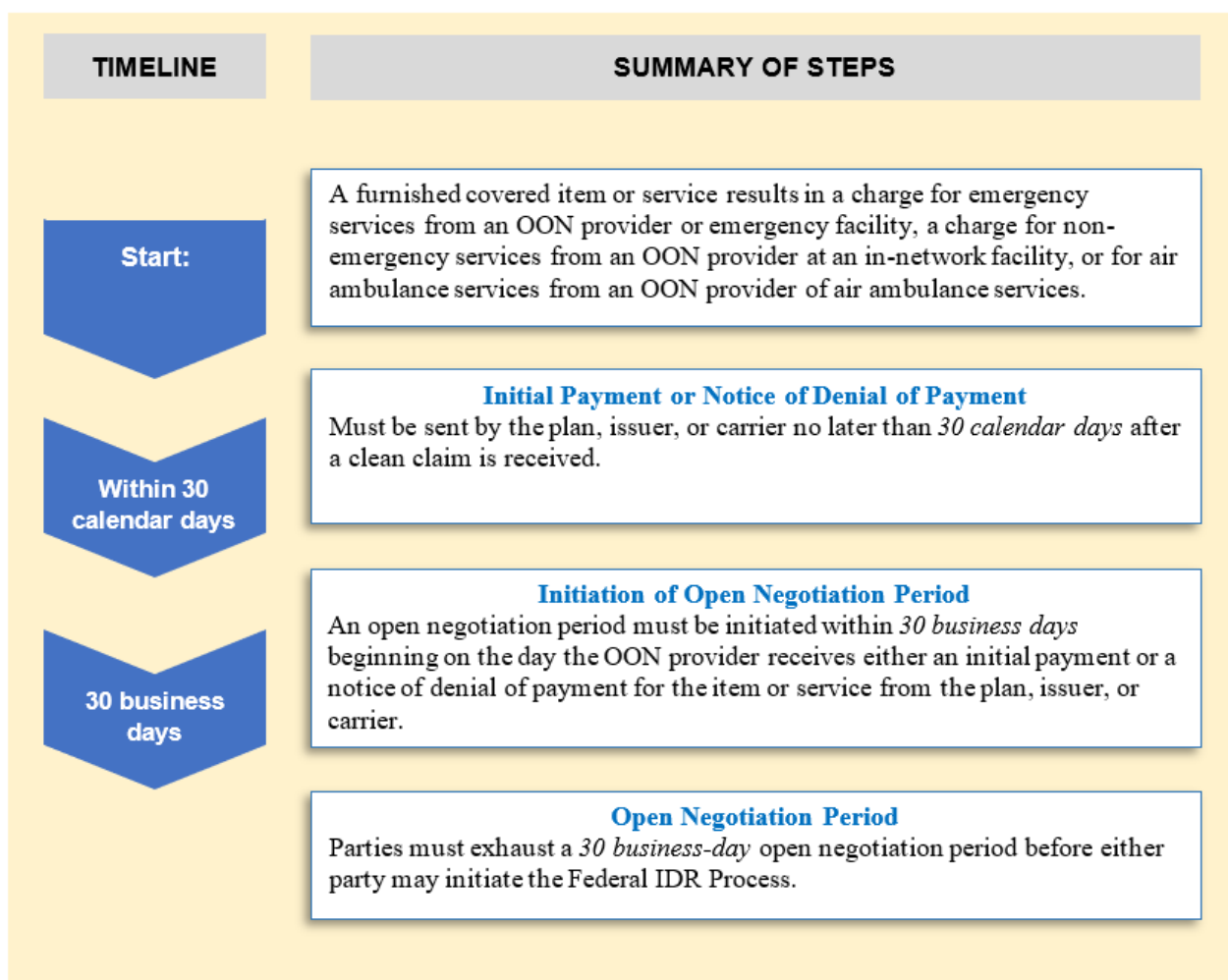
The Federal IDR Process also does not apply in cases where a state law or All-Payer Model Agreement establishes a method for determining the final OON payment amount. Specifically, some state laws provide a method for determining the total amount payable by a plan for an item or service furnished by an OON provider or facility or provider of air ambulance services to a participant, beneficiary, or enrollee, in circumstances covered by the NSA. The NSA refers to such laws as “specified state laws.” The NSA also recognizes that All-Payer Model Agreements under Section 1115A of the Social Security Act may provide state-approved amounts for OON items and services as well. Where an All-Payer Model Agreement or specified state law provides a method for determining the total amount payable for OON items and services, the state process will govern, rather than the Federal method for determining the OON rate under the NSA.

⁶ Requirements Related to Surprise Billing; Part I, 86 Fed. Reg. 36872 (July 13, 2021), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/07/13/2021-14379/requirements-related-to-surprise-billing-part-i>.

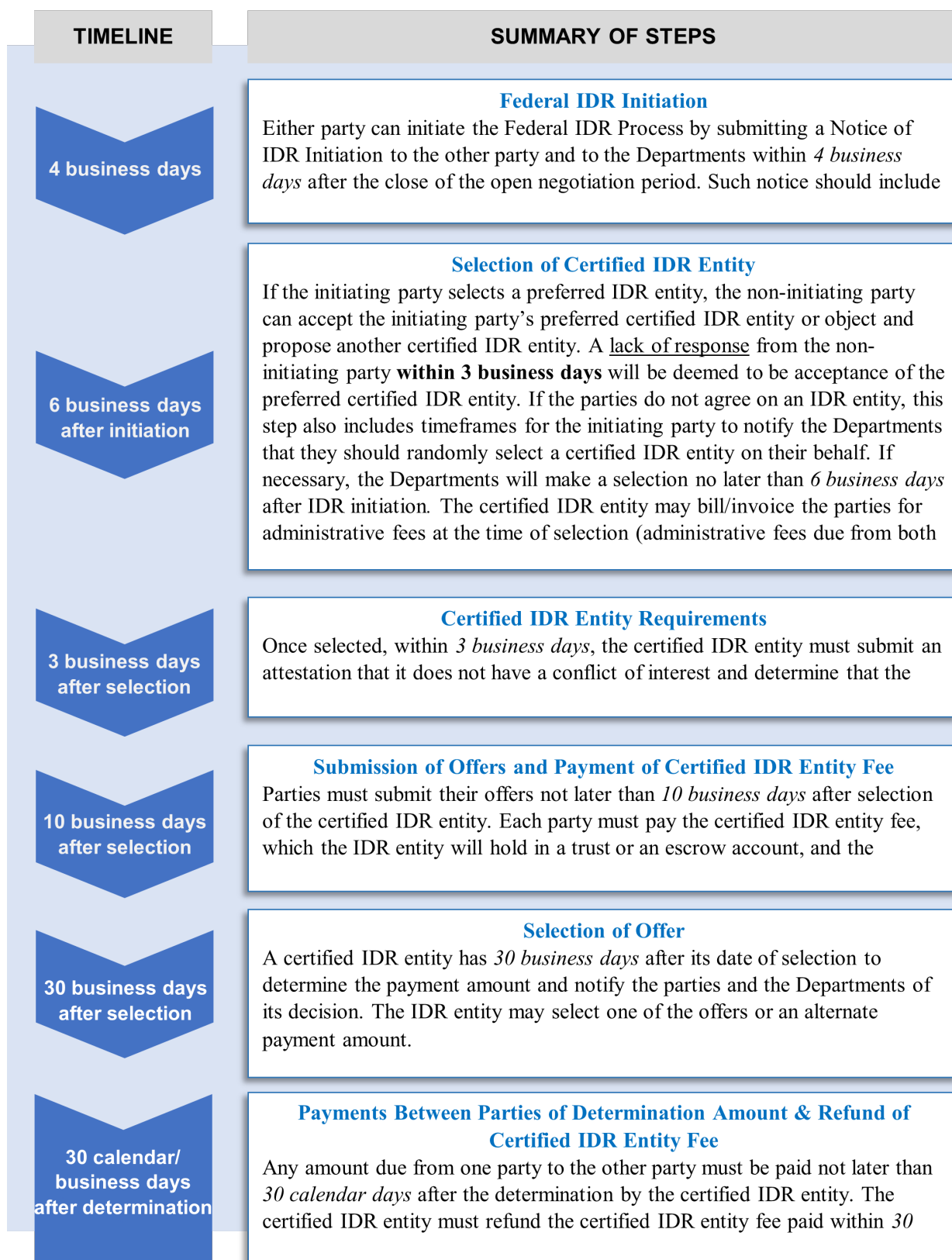
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to certified IDR entities on various aspects of the Federal IDR Process. This document includes information on how the parties to a payment dispute may initiate the Federal IDR Process and describes the requirements of the Federal IDR Process, including the requirements that certified IDR entities must follow in making a payment determination. This document also includes information related to other aspects of the Federal IDR Process that certified IDR entities must follow, including guidance on confidentiality standards, record keeping requirements, and the process for revocation of IDR certification, as well as how parties may request an extension of certain time periods for extenuating circumstances. For a detailed overview of the Federal IDR Process, see the visual below, “Federal IDR Process Overview.” Additional guidance may be developed in the future to address specific questions or scenarios submitted by certified IDR entities.

Steps Preceding the Federal IDR Process



Federal IDR Process Overview



2. Open Negotiations

The parties must undertake an open negotiation period prior to initiating the Federal IDR Process to determine the OON rate if items or services are:

- Emergency services furnished by an OON provider or facility subject to the NSA; or air ambulance services furnished by an OON provider of air ambulance services; or OON provider services furnished at an in-network facility; and
- Furnished to a covered enrollee who did not receive notice or did not provide adequate consent to waive the balance billing protections with regard to such items and services, pursuant to regulations at 45 CFR 149.410(b) or 149.420(c)-(i), as applicable; and
- Items or services for which the OON rate is not determined by reference to an All-Payer Model Agreement under Section 1115A of the Social Security Act or a specified state law.

2.1 Initiation of Open Negotiations

Either party may initiate the open negotiation process **within 30 business days** (Monday through Friday, not including Federal holidays), beginning on the day the OON provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services receives either an initial payment or a notice of denial of payment for the item or service from the plan.

The plan must include with its initial payment or denial of payment certain information, including the appropriate person or office to contact if the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services wishes to initiate open negotiations; a statement that, if the open negotiation period does not result in an agreement on the OON rate, either party to the open negotiation may initiate the Federal IDR Process; and the applicable qualifying payment amount (QPA) for each item or service involved (see definition of QPA at Section 7.2.1. below).

The party initiating the open negotiation must provide **written notice** to the other party of its intent to negotiate, referred to as an **open negotiation notice**, and must include information sufficient to identify the items or services subject to negotiation, including:

- The date(s) the item(s) or service(s) was/were furnished;
- The service code for the item(s) or service(s);
- The initial payment amount or notice of denial of payment, as applicable;
- Any offer for the OON rate; and
- Contact information of the party sending the open negotiation notice.

To facilitate communication between parties and compliance with this notice requirement, the Departments issued [a standard notice](#) that the parties must use to satisfy the open negotiation notice requirement.⁷

The **open negotiation notice** may be sent electronically (such as by email) if:

- The party sending the open negotiation notice has a good faith belief that the electronic method is readily accessible to the other party; and

⁷ See “Open Negotiation Period Notice” at: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ebsa/laws-and-regulations/laws/no-surprises-act>.

- Upon request, the notice is provided in paper form and free of charge.

2.2 Commencement of Open Negotiations

The **30-business-day open negotiation** period begins on the day on which the open negotiation notice is first sent by a party.

The requirement for a 30-business-day open negotiation period prior to initiating the Federal IDR Process does not preclude the parties from reaching an agreement in fewer than 30 business days or from continuing to negotiate after 30 business days. However, in the event the parties do not reach an agreement, the parties must still exhaust the 30-business-day open negotiation period before either party may initiate the Federal IDR Process.

If the open negotiation notice is not properly provided to the other party (and no reasonable measures have been taken to ensure that actual notice has been provided), the Departments may determine that the 30-business-day open negotiation period has not begun. In such a case, any subsequent payment determination from a certified IDR entity may be unenforceable due to the failure of the party sending the open negotiation notice to meet the open negotiation requirement, and the certified IDR entity would retain the certified IDR entity fee of the initiating party. Therefore, the Departments encourage parties submitting open negotiation notices to take steps to confirm that the other party's contact information is correct and confirm receipt by the other party, through approaches such as read receipts, especially where a party does not initially respond to an open negotiation notice. If either party has a concern that the open negotiation process did not occur or that the party was not notified of the open negotiation period, the party will be able to request an extension due to extenuating circumstances from the Departments through the Federal IDR portal⁸ at <https://www.nsa-idr.cms.gov>. Additionally, if either party believes that the other party is not in compliance with the balance billing protections, they may file a complaint with the No Surprises Help Desk at 1-800-985-3059. While a request for an extension due to extenuating circumstances is under review by the Departments, the Federal IDR Process and all of its timelines continue to apply, so the parties should continue to meet deadlines to the extent possible, as described in Section 6.

3. Initiating the Federal IDR Process

3.1 Timeframe

If the parties do not reach an agreement on the OON rate by the end of the 30-business-day open negotiation period, either party can initiate the Federal IDR Process by submitting a **Notice of IDR Initiation**⁹ to the other party and to the Departments **within 4 business days after the close of the open negotiation period** (in other words, 4 business days beginning on the 31st day after the start of the open negotiation period). The initiating party must furnish the Notice of IDR Initiation to the Departments by submitting the notice through the Federal IDR portal at

⁸ The Departments established the Federal IDR portal to administer the Federal IDR Process. The Departments' Federal IDR portal will be available at <https://www.nsa-idr.cms.gov> and will be used throughout the Federal IDR Process to maximize efficiency and reduce burden. The Federal IDR portal may be used to satisfy various functions including provision of notices, Federal IDR initiation, submission of an application to be a certified IDR entity, as well as satisfying reporting requirements.

⁹ Notice of IDR Initiation. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ebsa/laws-and-regulations/laws/no-surprises-act/surprise-billing-part-ii-information-collection-documents-attachment-3.pdf>.

<https://www.nsa-idr.cms.gov>. The notice must be furnished to the Departments on the same day it is furnished to the non-initiating party.

The initiation date of the Federal IDR Process is the date that the Departments receive the **Notice of IDR Initiation**. The Federal IDR portal will display the date on which the Notice of IDR Initiation has been received by the Departments.

3.2 Delivery of the Notice of Federal IDR Initiation

The **Notice of IDR Initiation** sent by the initiating party to the other party, may be accessed through the Federal IDR portal at <https://www.nsa-idr.cms.gov>, and may be sent electronically (such as by email) if:

- The initiating party has a good faith belief that the electronic method is readily accessible by the other party; and
- The notice is provided in paper form free of charge upon request.

The **Notice of IDR Initiation** sent to the Departments must be submitted through the Federal IDR portal.

3.3 Notice Content

The **Notice of IDR Initiation** must include:

- Initiating party type (i.e., provider, facility, provider of air ambulance services, or plan);
- Information sufficient to identify the qualified IDR items or services under dispute, including:
 - A description of qualified item(s) or service(s);
 - Whether item(s) and/or service(s) are batched;
 - The date(s) the item(s) was/were provided or the date of the service(s);
 - The location where the item(s) or service(s) was/were furnished (including the state or territory);
 - Any corresponding service and place-of-service codes;
 - The type of qualified IDR item or service (e.g., emergency, post-stabilization; professional);
 - The amount of cost sharing allowed; and
 - The amount of initial payment by the plan, where payment was made on the claim(s), if applicable;
- The QPA for each of the item(s) or service(s) involved;
- The following information from the plan about the QPA(s) that was provided to the provider or facility or provider of air ambulance services with the initial payment or notice of denial of payment:
 - The statement that the QPA applies for purposes of the recognized amount for the item(s) or service(s) in question (or, in the case of air ambulance services, for calculating the participant's, beneficiary's, or enrollee's cost sharing);
 - Any related service codes used to determine the QPA for new services;
 - Where requested by the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services, any information given by the plan about:

- Whether the QPA was calculated using non-fee-for-service rates and/or underlying fee schedules;
- Any databases used by the plan to determine the QPA; and
- Any statements noting that the plan's contracted rates include risk-sharing, bonus, penalty, or other incentive-based or retrospective payments or payment adjustments;
- The names and contact information of the parties involved, including:
 - Email addresses;
 - Phone numbers; and
 - Mailing addresses;
- The start date of the open negotiation period;
- The initiating party's preferred certified IDR entity;
- An attestation that the item(s) or service(s) under dispute is/are qualified IDR item(s) or service(s) within the scope of the Federal IDR Process; and
- General information describing the Federal IDR Process as specified by the Departments.

4. Federal IDR Process Following Initiation: Selection of the Certified IDR Entity

4.1 Timeframe

The parties involved in the Federal IDR Process may jointly select the certified IDR entity. The parties must select the certified IDR entity no later than **3 business days** following the date of the IDR initiation, as described above. The Departments will provide a list of certified IDR entities on the Federal IDR portal.

In the **Notice of IDR Initiation**, the initiating party will identify its preferred certified IDR entity. The other party, once in receipt of the **Notice of IDR Initiation**, may agree or object to the selection of the preferred certified IDR entity. Any objection must occur within the **3-business day** period for the selection of the certified IDR. Otherwise, absent any conflicts of interest, the initiating party's preferred certified IDR entity will be selected.

4.2 Objection to the Initiating Party's Selection of the Certified IDR Entity

When the party in receipt of the **Notice of IDR Initiation** objects to the initiating party's preferred certified IDR entity, that party must notify the initiating party of the objection. The notice provided to the initiating party must include an explanation of the reason for objecting and propose an alternative certified IDR entity. The initiating party must then agree or object to the alternative certified IDR entity within the **3-business-day period** for the selection of the certified IDR entity.

4.3 Notice of Agreement or Failure to Agree on Selection of Certified IDR Entity

The initiating party must notify the Departments by submitting **the notice of certified IDR entity selection or failure to select** through the Federal IDR portal that both parties agree on a certified IDR entity, or, in the alternative, that the parties have not agreed on a certified IDR entity. A notice must be submitted by the initiating party not later than **1 business day** after the end of the 3-business-day period for certified IDR entity selection (or in other words, 4 business days after the date of initiation of the Federal IDR Process) through the Federal IDR portal.

The **notice of the certified IDR entity selection** must include:

- The name of the certified IDR entity;
- The certified IDR entity number (unique number assigned to the entity through the Federal IDR portal); and
- An attestation by both parties (or by the initiating party if the other party has not responded) that the selected certified IDR entity does not have a conflict of interest with the parties (or party, as applicable), as described below in Section 4.6.1. This attestation must be submitted based on a conflicts-of-interest check using information available (or accessible using reasonable means) to the parties (or the initiating party if the other party has not responded) at the time of the selection.

The **notice of failure to select a certified IDR entity** must include:

- Indication that the parties have failed to select a certified IDR entity;
- Information regarding the lack of applicability of the Federal IDR process (if applicable); and
- Signature of initiating party, full name, and date.

4.4 Instances When the Non-Initiating Party Believes That the Federal IDR Process Does Not Apply

If the non-initiating party believes that the Federal IDR Process is not applicable, the non-initiating party must notify the Departments via the Federal IDR portal not later than **1 business day** after the end of the 3-business-day period for certified IDR entity selection (the same date that the notice of failure to select a certified IDR entity must be submitted). This notification must include information regarding the Federal IDR Process' inapplicability. The Departments will supply this information to the selected certified IDR entity, who may ask for additional information pursuant to this notification.

Ultimately, the certified IDR entity must determine whether the Federal IDR Process is applicable. The certified IDR entity must review the information submitted in the **Notice of IDR Initiation** to determine whether the Federal IDR Process applies. If the Federal IDR Process does not apply, the certified IDR entity must notify the Departments and the parties within 3 business days of making that determination.

4.5 Failure to Select a Certified IDR Entity: Random Selection by the Departments

When the parties cannot agree on the selection of a certified IDR entity, the Departments will randomly select a certified IDR entity **no later than 6 business days** after the date of initiation of the Federal IDR Process and will notify the parties of the selection.¹⁰ The certified IDR entity selected by the Departments will be one that charges a fee within the allowed range (as provided for in the [*Calendar Year 2022 Fee Guidance for the Federal Independent Dispute Resolution Process under the No Surprises Act*](#)). If there are insufficient certified IDR entities available that

¹⁰ A situation in which the non-initiating party does not object to the preferred certified IDR entity included in the initiating party's Notice of IDR Initiation, and the initiating party submits its preferred certified IDR entity on the Notice of Certified IDR Entity Selection, is not considered a failure to select a certified IDR entity.

charge a fee within the allowed range, the Departments will randomly select a certified IDR entity that has approval to charge a fee outside of that range.

4.6 Certified IDR Entity Responsibilities After Selection

After a certified IDR entity is selected either by the parties or by the Departments, it must attest to meeting the conflicts of interest requirements as described below in Section 4.6.1. The certified IDR entity must also determine whether the Federal IDR Process as described below in Section 4.6.2.

A certified IDR entity:

- 1) Must attest to being free of conflicts of interest, and
- 2) Determines Federal IDR Process applicability to the dispute.

See Sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.2 for more details.

4.6.1 *Conflicts of Interest*

After the certified IDR entity is selected either by the parties or by the Departments, it must attest to meeting the conflicts of interest requirements, described below in this Section 4.6.1. If the certified IDR entity cannot attest to meeting these requirements, it must notify the Departments of its inability to attest via the Federal IDR portal. This notification to the Departments must occur within **3 business days** after the selection of the certified IDR entity. Upon receiving notice of the certified IDR entity's inability to attest (or in the event the certified IDR entity fails to attest to meeting the conflicts of interest requirements within the 3-business-day period), the Departments will notify the parties. Once the parties are notified, they will have **3 business days** to select another certified IDR entity, or, when the parties have indicated that they cannot agree on a certified IDR entity, the Departments will randomly select another certified IDR entity, pursuant to Section 4.5 above.

A certified IDR entity **must not have any conflicts of interest** with respect to a party to a payment determination. Specifically, neither the certified IDR entity nor a party to the payment determination can have a material relationship, status, or condition that impacts the ability of the certified IDR entity to make an unbiased and impartial payment determination. Among other things, the **certified IDR entity must not**:

- Have, or have personnel, contractors, or subcontractors assigned to a determination who have, a material familial, financial, or professional relationship with a party to the payment determination being disputed. This extends to material relationships with any plan, officer, director, management employee, administrator, fiduciaries, or employees; the health care provider or the health care provider's group or practice association; the provider of air ambulance services or the provider of air ambulance services' group or practice association; or the facility that is a party to the dispute.

In addition, *the certified IDR entity must also ensure that any personnel decisions, such as hiring, compensation, or promotion, are not based on personnel supporting one party or a particular type of party.* Finally, personnel of the certified IDR entity must not have been party to the payment determination being disputed, or an employee or agent of such a party within the one-year period immediately preceding an assignment to a payment determination, similar to the requirements described in 18 U.S.C. §§ 207(b), (c), and (e).¹¹

4.6.2 Determining Applicability of the Federal IDR Process to Dispute

In addition to checking for and submitting an attestation regarding conflicts of interest, the **certified IDR entity must determine whether the Federal IDR Process applies** by reviewing whether any specified state laws or All-Payer Model Agreements are applicable to the dispute in question. The Federal IDR Process will apply to self-insured plans sponsored by private employers, except in cases where a self-insured plan has opted into a state process that constitutes a specified state law or into an All-Payer Model Agreement under Section 1115A of the SSA, in a state that permits an opt-in. Similarly, the Federal IDR Process will apply to health benefits plans offered under 5 U.S.C. 8902, except in cases where an OPM contract with an FEHB Carrier includes terms that adopt the state process. If the certified IDR entity concludes that the Federal IDR Process does not apply (including to any particular claim under dispute in the case of batched claims), it must notify both the Departments and the parties within **3 business days** of making this determination.

4.7 Treatment of Batched Items and Services and Bundled Payment Arrangements

The NSA allows for multiple qualified claims to be considered as part of a single IDR determination (batching). Batching the same or similar qualified IDR items and services decreases the number of IDR proceedings and streamlines certified IDR entity decision-making.

A certified IDR entity may consider multiple qualified IDR items and services jointly as a part of one IDR payment determination when:

- The qualified IDR items or services are billed by the same provider, group of providers, facility, or provider of air ambulance services, under the same National Provider Identifier (NPI) or Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN);
- The payment for the items and services is made by the same plan;
- The qualified IDR items and services are the same or similar items or services, meaning they are items and services that are billed under the same service code, or a comparable code under a different procedural code system. The Departments have defined the service codes as the code that describes a qualified IDR item or service using Current Procedural Terminology (CPT), Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS), or Diagnosis-Related Group (DRG); and
- All the qualified IDR items and services were furnished within the same 30-business-day period, or the same 90-calendar-day cooling-off period, as described in Section 8.1.

¹¹ 18 U.S.C. § 207 imposes restrictions on former officers, employees, and elected officials of the executive and legislative branches. Specifically, Section 207(b) provides a one-year restriction on aiding and advising, Section 207(c) provides a one-year restriction on certain senior personnel of the executive branch and independent agencies, and Section 207(e) provides restrictions on Members of Congress and officers and employees of the legislative branch.

In the case of qualified IDR items or services that are billed by a provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services as part of a bundled arrangement, or where a plan makes an initial payment as a bundled payment (or specifies that a denial of payment is made on a bundled payment basis), those qualified items or services may be submitted and considered as part of one payment determination.

4.8 Payment of Administrative Fees

If the certified IDR entity attests to no conflicts of interest and concludes that the Federal IDR Process applies, the **certified IDR entity must collect the administrative fee** from both parties to later remit to the Departments. Applicable regulations require the parties to pay the administrative fee when the certified IDR entity is selected. Thus, as an operational matter, administrative fees may be billed by the certified IDR entity at the time of selection and must be collected by the time of offer submission (see Section 5.3). So long as administrative fees are collected by the time the offers are submitted (which is also when the certified IDR entity fees must be paid), the certified IDR entity has discretion on when to collect the administrative fee. See Section 10 for additional information on the administrative fee.

5. Payment Determination: Submission of Offers

5.1 Submission of Offers to the Certified IDR Entity

No later than 10 business days after the selection of the certified IDR entity, each party must submit **to the certified IDR entity**:

- An offer for the OON rate expressed both as a dollar amount and as a percentage of the QPA (see Section 7.2.1) represented by that dollar amount;
- For batched qualified IDR items or services, where batched items or services have different QPAs, parties should provide these different QPAs and may provide different offers for these items and services, provided that the same offer should apply for all items and services with the same QPA;
- Information requested by the certified IDR entity relating to the offer; and
- Additional information, as applicable:
 - Providers must specify whether the provider practice or organization has fewer than 20 employees, 20 to 50 employees, 51 to 100 employees, 101 to 500 employees, or more than 500 employees;
 - Facilities must specify whether the facility has 50 or fewer employees, 51 to 100 employees, 101 to 500 employees, or more than 500 employees;
 - Providers and facilities must also provide information on their practice specialty or type, respectively;
 - Plans must provide the coverage area of the plan, the relevant geographic region for purposes of the QPA, and, for group health plans, whether they are fully-insured, or partially or fully self-insured; and
 - Plans must provide the QPA for the applicable year for the same or similar item or service as the qualified IDR item or service.

5.2 Federal IDR Portal

Any requests for and submission of information related to the offer must be made through the Federal IDR portal at <https://www.nsa-idr.cms.gov>.

5.3 Payment of Certified IDR Entity Fees

Each party **must pay the certified IDR entity fee** to the certified IDR entity with the submission of their offer. See Section 10 for additional information on the certified IDR entity fee.

5.4 Consequences for Failure to Submit an Offer

At the time at which offers from both parties should have been submitted, if one party has not submitted an offer, the certified IDR entity will accept the other party's offer.

6. Extension of Time Periods for Extenuating Circumstances

Certain time periods in the Federal IDR Process may be extended in the case of extenuating circumstances at the Departments' discretion.

- **Time periods for payments CANNOT be extended:** The timing of the payments, including if applicable, payments to the provider, facility, provider of air ambulance services, or plan, cannot be extended. Payments of the administrative fee and certified entity fee may be granted if an extension of the timeline for the submission of offers is granted due to extenuating circumstances. All other time periods are eligible for an extension at the Departments' discretion.
- **What qualifies as "extenuating circumstances" for an extension:** The Departments may extend time periods on a case-by-case basis if the extension is necessary to address delays due to matters beyond the control of the parties or for good cause. Such an extension may be necessary if, for example, a natural disaster impedes efforts by plans, issuers, providers, facilities, and providers of air ambulance services to comply with time-period requirements.
- **How to request an extension:** Parties may request an extension, and provide applicable attestations, by submitting a **Request for Extension Due to Extenuating Circumstances** through the Federal IDR portal, including an explanation about the extenuating circumstances that require an extension and why the extension is needed. The requesting party is required to attest that prompt action will be taken to ensure that the determination delayed under the extension will be made as soon as administratively practicable.
- **When to request an extension:** A request for an extension can be filed at any time, either before or after a deadline, and the Departments will consider the request and may grant the extension. However, requesting an extension does not stop the Federal IDR Process, and all of its timelines continue to apply unless and until an extension is granted, so the parties should continue to meet deadlines to the extent possible.

- **Extensions for IDR Entities:** A certified IDR entity can request an extension of its deadline due to an “extenuating circumstance” by contacting the Departments through the Federal IDR portal.

7. Payment Determination: Selection of Offer

7.1 Timeframe

Not later than **30 business days** after the selection of the certified IDR entity, the certified IDR entity must:

- Select one of the offers submitted by the disputing parties to be the OON rate for the qualified IDR item or service;
- After considering the QPA, additional information requested by the certified IDR entity from the parties, and all of the credible information that the parties submit that is consistent with the requirements in 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(c)(4)(i)(A), 29 CFR 2590.716-8(c)(4)(i)(A), or 45 CFR 149.510(c)(4)(i)(A), the certified IDR entity must select the offer closest to the QPA, unless the credible information submitted by the parties clearly demonstrates that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate, based on the additional circumstances allowed under 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(c)(4)(iii)(B) through (D), 29 CFR 2590.716-8(c)(4)(iii)(B) through (D), or 45 CFR 149.510(c)(4)(iii)(B) through (D) with respect to the qualified IDR item or service.
- Notify all parties to the determination and the Departments of the selection of the offer;
- Provide a written decision to all parties regarding the determination; and
- If the certified IDR entity does not choose the offer closest to the QPA, the certified IDR entity’s written decision must include an explanation of the credible information that the certified IDR entity determined demonstrated that the QPA was materially different from the appropriate OON rate, based on certain allowed considerations, as discussed below in Section 7.2.

7.2 Consideration of the QPA

7.2.1 Definition of QPA

Generally, the QPA is the *median of the contracted rates* recognized by the plan for the same or similar item or service that is provided by a provider in the same or similar specialty and provided in the same geographic region in which the item or service under dispute was furnished, increased by inflation. The plan calculates the QPA using a methodology established in the July 2021 interim final rules.¹² The QPA generally will reflect standard market rates arrived at through typical contract negotiations (through arms-length negotiations between providers, facilities, and providers of air ambulance services and plans, issuers, or their service providers) and should therefore be a reasonable OON rate in most circumstances.

¹² 86 FR 36872 (July 13, 2021).

Selection of Offer – Baseball Style Arbitration:

The certified IDR entity must select one of the offers submitted by the disputing parties or determine an alternate payment amount. The certified IDR entity determination is final and legally binding.

- **It is not the role of the certified IDR entity** to determine whether the QPA has been calculated correctly by the plan, make determinations of medical necessity, or to review denials of coverage. NOTE: If the certified IDR entity or a party believes that the QPA has not been calculated correctly, the certified IDR entity or party is encouraged to notify the Departments through the Federal IDR portal, and the Departments may take action regarding the QPA's calculation. The party may also submit information demonstrating that the QPA is not the appropriate OON rate to the certified IDR entity, in keeping with the requirements described in Section 5.1.
- As noted below, after determining that the Federal IDR Process applies, the certified IDR entity is responsible **only for** considering whether the information presented by the parties is credible, and, if credible (and not related to prohibited factors, as described in Section 7.4.3), whether the information submitted demonstrates that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate, in order to rebut the presumption that the QPA is the appropriate OON rate, except when offers are equally distant from the QPA in opposing directions, as described in Section 7.2.2.

7.2.2 Certified IDR Entity: When and How to Apply the QPA

In determining which payment offer to select, the certified IDR entity must begin with **the presumption that the QPA is the appropriate OON rate** for the qualified IDR item or service under consideration.

The certified IDR entity **must select the offer closest to the QPA, unless credible information** submitted by either party in relation to the offer (see Section 5.1) **clearly demonstrates** that the QPA is **materially different** from the appropriate OON rate for the qualified IDR item or service, based on the additional circumstances described below.

In cases where credible information clearly demonstrates that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate, or when the offers are equally distant from the QPA but in opposing directions, the certified IDR entity must select the offer that the certified IDR entity determines best represents the value of the qualified IDR items or services, which could be either offer submitted.

For batched or bundled items and services, the certified IDR entity may select different offers, from either or both parties, when the QPAs for the qualified IDR items or services within the batch or bundle are different. For example, if a dispute batched multiple claims for Service A furnished by Provider B to individuals covered by Issuer C, with some individuals covered by plans in the individual market and others covered by plans in the large group market, there likely would be two different QPAs for the certified IDR entity to consider – one QPA for the services furnished to individuals enrolled in individual market coverage, and one QPA for individuals

with large group market coverage. In these instances, the parties must provide the relevant information for each QPA, and the certified IDR entity must consider each QPA for each qualified IDR item or service separately. The certified IDR entity must do so even if it does not select the offer closest to the QPA for a particular qualified IDR item or service due to the factors listed below, but does select the offer closest to the QPA for other qualified IDR items and services within the batch or bundle.

7.3 Standards for Rebutting the Presumption - Credible Information and Material Difference from the QPA

Information is considered **credible** if, upon critical analysis, the information is worthy of belief and is trustworthy. A **material difference** exists when there is a substantial likelihood that a reasonable person with the training and qualifications of a certified IDR entity making a payment determination would consider the information significant in determining the OON rate and would view the information as showing that the QPA is not the appropriate OON rate.

7.4 Consideration of Information Requested by the Certified IDR Entity or Provided by Either Party Related to Either Offer

As noted above (Section 7.2.2), the certified IDR entity must begin its selection of offers by presuming that the QPA is an appropriate OON rate. However, **the certified IDR entity must also consider additional credible information submitted by the parties.** Three general rules govern the consideration of additional information:

- **First**, the certified IDR entity must consider only information that it considers credible.
- **Second**, the certified IDR entity must consider only information that is submitted in connection to an offer of either party.
- **Third**, the certified IDR entity must not consider information on prohibited factors, described further below at Section 7.4.3.

In determining which offer to select, the certified IDR entity must consider:

- **The QPA(s)** for the applicable year for the qualified IDR item or service; and
- **Additional credible information relating to the offer submitted by the parties that relates to the circumstances** described below; that does not include information on prohibited factors (see Sections 7.4.1, 7.4.2, and 7.4.3 described below). This includes additional information requested by the certified IDR entity from the parties, and all of the credible information that the parties submit that is consistent with the requirements in 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(c)(4)(i)(A), 29 CFR 2590.716-8(c)(4)(i)(A), or 45 CFR 149.510(c)(4)(i)(A).

Certified IDR Entities Must Consider:

- 1) QPA(s) for the applicable year for the qualified IDR item or service; and
 - 2) **Other information submitted by a party** as long as it does not contain prohibited factors, and is credible.
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7.4.1 *Additional Information Submitted by a Party that Relates to Certain Circumstances*

For non-air ambulance qualified IDR items and services, parties may submit additional information regarding any of the five circumstances discussed below (see **Table 1**). The certified IDR entity must consider credible information submitted to determine if it demonstrates that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate (unless the information relates to a factor that the certified IDR entity is prohibited from considering).

Table 1: Non-air Ambulance Items and Services – Additional Circumstances

Circumstance/Factor
<p>1. The level of training, experience, and quality and outcomes measurements of the provider or facility that furnished the qualified IDR item or service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information must clearly demonstrate the experience or level of training of a provider was necessary for providing the qualified IDR item or service to the patient, or that their experience or training made an impact on the care that was provided, and that this information was not considered in the calculation of the QPA. • The level of training or experience of a provider does <u>not</u> justify an OON rate higher than the offer closest to the QPA unless the provider demonstrates that the level of training or experience impacted patient care and outcome. For example, the OON payment amount for the simple repair of a superficial wound (CPT codes 12001-12007) in most cases would not necessitate a rate higher than the QPA just because a provider has 30 years of experience versus 10 years of experience. Alternatively, for example, if the plan's contracted rates included risk-sharing, bonus, penalty, or other incentive-based or retrospective payments that were excluded for purposes of calculating the QPA for the items and services as required by the July 2021 interim final rules, a party may provide evidence as to why the provider's or facility's quality or outcome measures support an OON rate that is different from the QPA, and the certified IDR entity should consider whether this additional information requires it to select an OON rate that is higher (in the case of a bonus) or lower (in the case of a penalty) than the offer closest to the QPA.
<p>2. The market share held by the provider or facility or that of the plan in the geographic region in which the qualified IDR item or service was provided.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information must clearly demonstrate the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate. For example, the QPA may be unreasonably high (provider or facility market dominance) or unreasonably low (plan market dominance).

Circumstance/Factor
<p>3. The acuity of the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee receiving the qualified IDR item or service, or the complexity of furnishing the qualified IDR item or service to the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information about patient acuity or the complexity of furnishing the qualified IDR item or service to the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee must clearly demonstrate that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate for the qualified IDR item or service. • In many cases, service codes and modifiers reflecting patient acuity and complexity of a service will already be reflected in the QPA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Therefore, information for this factor should <u>only</u> be considered in rare instances such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Outliers (where the intensity of care exceeds what is typical for the code); ii. The QPA is considered too high for qualified IDR items or services that have become less complex over time; or iii. The parties disagree on what service code or modifier accurately describes the qualified IDR item or service (for example, downcoding, so that, upon review, the service code or modifier submitted is adjusted to something the plan believes to be more appropriate and which results in lower reimbursement).
<p>4. The teaching status, case mix, and scope of services of the facility that furnished the qualified IDR item or service, if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information must demonstrate the teaching status, case mix, or scope of services of the OON facility was in some way critical to the delivery of the item or service and not adequately accounted for in the QPA. • For example, a certified IDR entity could consider the trauma level of a hospital when the dispute involves trauma care or qualified IDR items or services that could not be performed at a lower-level hospital, but only to the extent the QPA does not otherwise reflect this factor.
<p>5. Demonstration of good faith efforts (or lack thereof) made by the provider or facility or the plan to enter into network agreements with each other, and, if applicable, contracted rates between the provider or facility, as applicable, and the plan during the previous 4 plan years. For example, a certified IDR entity must consider what the contracted rate might have been had the good faith negotiations resulted in the OON provider or facility being in-network, if a party is able to provide related credible information of good faith efforts or the lack thereof.</p>

7.4.2 *Additional Circumstances Submitted by a Party for Air Ambulance Services*

For air ambulance services, parties may submit additional information regarding any of the six circumstances discussed below (see **Table 2**). As with non-air ambulance qualified IDR items or services, the certified IDR entity should only consider this information to the extent the certified IDR entity determines that either party submitted credible information that clearly demonstrates that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate.

Table 2: Air Ambulance Services – Additional Circumstances

Circumstance/Factor
<p>1. The quality and outcomes measurements of the provider of air ambulance services that furnished the services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information about the quality and outcomes measurements of the provider of air ambulance services that furnished the services must clearly demonstrate that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate.

Circumstance/Factor
<p>2. The acuity of the condition of the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee receiving the services, or the complexity of providing services to the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information about the acuity of the condition of the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee receiving the services, or the complexity of providing the services to the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee, must clearly demonstrate that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate.
<p>3. The level of training, experience, and quality of medical personnel that furnished the air ambulance services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information about whether the level of training, experience, and quality of medical personnel that furnished the air ambulance services clearly demonstrates the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate.
<p>4. The air ambulance vehicle type, including the clinical capability level of such vehicle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified IDR entities must consider whether credible information about the ambulance vehicle type, including the clinical capability level of the vehicle, clearly demonstrates that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate. • Certified IDR entities may not consider whether the air ambulance is fixed wing or rotary wing, as that will be reflected in the QPA. • Certified IDR entities must consider whether credible information that the air ambulance vehicle type and the vehicle's level of clinical capability only to the extent not already taken into account by the QPA.
<p>5. The population density of the point of pick-up for the air ambulance of the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee (such as urban, suburban, rural, or frontier).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The QPA for the geographic regions used to calculate the QPA may already reflect the population density of the pick-up location. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, the QPA for air ambulance services may not adequately capture the population density, due to additional distinctions, such as between metropolitan areas within a state, or between rural and frontier areas. • Credible information about additional circumstances must clearly demonstrate that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate for a particular air ambulance service.
<p>6. Demonstrations of good faith efforts (or lack of thereof) made by the OON provider of air ambulance services or the plan to enter into network agreements, as well as contracted rates between the provider and the plan during the previous 4 plan years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credible information about demonstrations of good faith efforts (or lack thereof) made by the nonparticipating provider of air ambulance services or the plan to enter into network agreements, as well as contracted rates between the provider and the plan, as applicable, during the previous 4 plan years, must clearly demonstrate that the QPA is materially different from the appropriate OON rate for such air ambulance services.

7.4.3 *Prohibited Factors*

When making a payment determination, the certified IDR entity *must not* consider the following factors:

- Usual and customary charges (including payment or reimbursement rates expressed as a proportion of usual and customary charges);
- The amount that would have been billed by the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services with respect to the qualified IDR item or service had the provisions of 45 CFR 149.410 and 149.420 (as applicable) not applied; or
- The payment or reimbursement rate for items and services furnished by the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services payable by a public payor, including under

the Medicare program under title XVIII of the Social Security Act; the Medicaid program under title XIX of the Social Security Act; the Children's Health Insurance Program under title XXI of the Social Security Act; the TRICARE program under chapter 55 of title 10, United States Code; chapter 17 of title 38, United States Code; or demonstration projects under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act. This provision also prohibits consideration of payment or reimbursement rates expressed as a proportion of rates payable by public payors.

8. Written Payment Determination

Certified IDR entities have **30 business days** from their date of selection to select one of the offers submitted and notify the plan, and the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services, as well as the Departments, of the certified IDR entity's payment determination.

The certified IDR entity must notify the parties and the Departments and must explain its payment determination by submitting a written decision through the Federal IDR portal. *Details on the form and manner for submitting the written decision will be provided in future guidance.*

The written payment determination must contain the following:

- The certified IDR entity's determination of the payment amount and the underlying rationale for its determination; and
- If the certified IDR entity does not choose the offer closest to the QPA, an explanation of the credible information that the certified IDR entity determined demonstrated that the QPA was materially different from the appropriate OON rate, based on the allowable considerations. This explanation is not required if the certified IDR entity chooses between two offers that are equally distant from the QPA in opposing directions.

Payment Determination:

Certified IDR entities must select a payment offer **within 30 business days** and notify the plan, and the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services, as well as the Departments. The determination is final and legally binding.

8.1 Effect of Determination

After a certified IDR entity makes a payment determination, the following requirements apply:

- **Payment:** The amount due to the prevailing party, which is the party whose offer is selected or whose offer is closest to the final payment amount, must be paid not later than **30 calendar days** after the determination by the certified IDR entity, as follows:
-

<i>If payment is owed by a plan to the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services...</i>	<i>If the plan is owed a refund...</i>
The plan will be liable for additional payments when the amount of the offer selected exceeds the sum of any initial payment the plan has paid to the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services and any cost sharing paid or owed by the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee.	The provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services will be liable to the plan when the offer selected by the certified IDR entity is less than the sum of the plan's initial payment and any cost sharing paid by the participant, beneficiary, or enrollee.

NOTE: This determination of the OON rate does not change the participant's, beneficiary's, or enrollee's cost sharing, which is based on the recognized amount, or, in the case of air ambulance services, the lower of the QPA or billed charges.

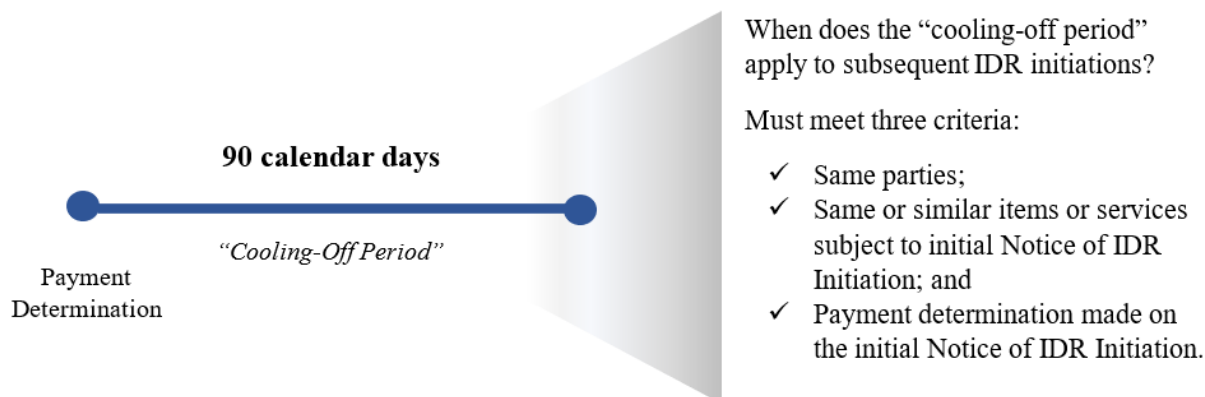
Also note that the non-prevailing party is ultimately responsible for the certified IDR entity fee, which is retained by the certified IDR entity for the services it performed. The certified IDR entity fee that was paid by the prevailing party will be returned to the prevailing party by the certified IDR entity at the conclusion of the Federal IDR Process. In the event a resolution is reached outside of the Federal IDR Process, the certified IDR entity must refund each party half of the certified IDR entity fee.

The certified IDR entity must refund the prevailing party the IDR entity fee within 30 calendar days. In the event neither party is the prevailing party or a resolution is reached outside of the IDR process, the IDR entity must refund each party half of the IDR entity fee.

- **Binding Determination:** The certified IDR entity's determination is binding upon all parties involved, unless there is fraud or evidence of intentional misrepresentation of material facts to the certified IDR entity by any party regarding the claim.
- **Subsequent IDR Requests:** The party that initiated the Federal IDR Process may not submit a subsequent Notice of IDR Initiation involving the same other party with respect to a claim for the same or similar item or service that was the subject of the initial Notice of IDR Initiation during the 90-calendar-day suspension period following the determination, also referred to as a "cooling-off" period.

NOTE:

“Cooling-Off Period”: The 90-calendar-day period following a payment determination when the initiating party cannot submit a subsequent Notice of IDR Initiation involving the same party with respect to a claim for the same or similar item or service that was the subject of the initial Notice of IDR Initiation.



9. Recordkeeping and Reporting Requirements

- **6-year recordkeeping requirement:** *Certified IDR entities must maintain records of all claims and notices associated with the Federal IDR Process with respect to any payment determination for 6 years.* These records must be available upon request by the parties to the dispute or a state or Federal agency with oversight authority over a disputing party, except when disclosure is not permitted under state or Federal privacy law.
- **Mandatory monthly reporting by certified IDR entities:** *Certified IDR entities are required to submit data to the Departments on the Federal IDR Process as an ongoing condition of certification.* The Departments will use this information to publish certain aggregated information on a public website as required by the NSA.

Each certified IDR entity will be required to report the data in Table 3 within 30 business days of the close of each month through the Federal IDR portal.

The Departments expect that many of these reporting requirements will be captured through the Federal IDR portal, and the Departments do not intend for certified IDR entities to report duplicative information. The Departments will provide additional guidance to certified IDR entities on their specific reporting obligations.

Table 3: Information to be Reported by Certified IDR Entities on a Monthly Basis

Category of Information	Reporting for Qualified IDR Items and Services That Are <u>Not</u> Air Ambulance Services:	Reporting for Air Ambulance Qualified IDR Services:
QPA versus OON Rate	For each determination issued during the immediately preceding month, the number of times the OON rate payment amount determined or agreed to was higher than the QPA, as specified by items or services.	Same.
Notices of IDR Initiation	<p>Number of Notices submitted to the certified IDR entity during the immediately preceding month.</p> <p>The number of these Notices for the immediately preceding month with respect to which a final determination was made.</p>	Same.
Administrative Fees Collected on Behalf of the Departments	Number of determinations for which the certified IDR entity collected administrative fees from the parties during the immediately preceding month.	Same.
Certified IDR Entity Fees	Total amount of fees paid to the certified IDR entity during the immediately preceding month, not including amounts refunded by the certified IDR entity to the prevailing party (or both parties in the case of settlements) or the administrative fees that are collected on behalf of the Departments.	Same.
Final Determinations	For each determination issued during the immediately preceding month, a description of the qualified IDR items and services included in the Notice of IDR Initiation, with relevant billing and service codes. ¹³	Same.

¹³ This information should include the relevant billing and service codes, such as the CPT, HCPCS, or DRG codes if applicable.

Category of Information	Reporting for Qualified IDR Items and Services That Are <u>Not</u> Air Ambulance Services:	Reporting for Air Ambulance Qualified IDR Services:
	<p>The amount of the offers submitted by each party and the selected offer, expressed as both a dollar amount and as a percentage of the QPA, and whether the offer selected was submitted by the plan, or provider or facility.¹⁴</p> <p>The certified IDR entity's rationale for its decision, including the extent to which the decision relied on criteria other than the QPA.</p> <p>The name and address for each plan, and provider or facility.</p> <p>The number of business days that lapsed between selection of the certified IDR entity and the determination of the OON rate.</p> <p>The relevant geographic region for purposes of the QPA for the qualified IDR items and services with respect to the Notices of IDR Initiation received.</p> <p>Practice specialty or type of each provider or facility, respectively, involved in furnishing each qualified IDR item or service.</p>	<p>Same. Whether the offer selected was the offer submitted by the plan, or by the provider of air ambulance services.</p> <p>Same.</p> <p>Same, for each plan, and provider of air ambulance services.</p> <p>Same.</p> <p>Different. The point of pick-up (as defined in 42 CFR 414.605) for the services included in the Notice of IDR Initiation.</p> <p>Different. Air ambulance vehicle type, including the clinical capability level of such vehicle, to the extent this information has been provided to the certified IDR entity.</p>

¹⁴ Reporting may vary depending on how offers are submitted for batched items and services. If one batch of services included services to which two different QPAs applied, and the parties each submitted an offer for all batched services, the certified IDR entity must report each offer as a dollar amount and as a percentage of both QPAs. However, if instead each party submitted two offers – one that applied to the services for which one QPA applied and one that applied to the services for which the other QPA applied – then the certified IDR entity is required to report each offer separately and must express each offer as a dollar amount and as a percentage of the applicable QPA. When the QPA differs within a group of batched items and services, the certified IDR entity also must include whether the OON rate (or various OON rates, when more than one OON rate is selected) exceeded the applicable QPA.

Category of Information	Reporting for Qualified IDR Items and Services That Are <u>Not</u> Air Ambulance Services:	Reporting for Air Ambulance Qualified IDR Services:
Provider Practice and/or Facility Size	Size of the provider practices and size of the facilities submitting Notices of IDR Initiation during the immediately preceding month, as required to be provided to the certified IDR entity. ¹⁵	Not applicable.

10. Federal IDR Process Fees

10.1 Administrative Fee

- The administrative fee is an estimate of the cost to the Departments to carry out the Federal IDR Process;
- Each party is required to pay an administrative fee;
- Each party pays one administrative fee per single or per batched determination;
- Administrative fees are allowed to be billed/invoiced by the certified IDR **entity at the time of selection and must be paid by the time of offer submission**, but the certified IDR entity has discretion on when to collect the administrative fee (as long as it is collected by the time the offers are submitted (which is when the certified IDR entity fees are to be paid)); and
- The administrative **fees will not be refunded** even if the parties reach an agreement before the certified IDR entity makes a determination.

10.2 Certified IDR Entity Fee

Each party must pay the entire certified IDR entity fee. **The certified IDR entity fees are due when the party submits their offer.**

- As a condition of certification, each certified IDR entity is **required** to indicate to the Departments the certified IDR entity fees it intends to charge;
- The fee must be within a pre-determined range specified by the Departments, unless otherwise approved by the Departments in writing. The Departments will review and update the allowable fee range annually, and a certified IDR entity may seek approval from the Departments to update its fees annually; and
- A **certified IDR entity must submit a written proposal** to charge a fee beyond the upper or lower limit of the pre-determined range. The Federal IDR portal will provide the functionality for certified IDR entities and entities applying to become certified IDR entities to request an alternative flat fee. The written proposal **must include**:
 - The alternative flat fee the IDR entity seeking certification or certified IDR entity believes is appropriate;
 - A description of the circumstances that require an alternative flat fee; and

¹⁵ The certified IDR entity must specify whether the provider practice has fewer than 20 employees, 20 to 50 employees, 51 to 100 employees, 101 to 500 employees or more than 500 employees. For facilities, the certified IDR entity must specify whether the facility has 50 or fewer employees, 51 to 100 employees, 101 to 500 employees, or more than 500 employees.

- A description of how the alternative flat fee will be used to mitigate the effects of these circumstances. Note that the certified IDR entity may not charge a fee that is not within the approved limits as set forth in guidance unless the certified IDR entity receives written approval from the Departments to charge a flat rate beyond the upper or lower limits determined in the annual fee guidance.

The **certified IDR entity must hold the certified IDR entity fees in a trust or escrow account** until the certified IDR entity determines the OON rate, after which point the certified IDR entity must refund to the prevailing party the amount submitted for the certified IDR entity fee **within 30 business days**.

The certified IDR entity **retains the non-prevailing party's certified IDR entity fee** as compensation for the certified IDR entity's services.

If the parties negotiate an OON rate before a determination is made, the certified IDR entity will return half of each party's payment for the certified IDR entity fee within 30 business days, unless directed otherwise by both parties to distribute the total amount of the refund in different shares.

Collection of Fees:

The certified IDR entity fee must be paid by both parties by the time of offer submission.

The certified IDR entity retains the non-prevailing party's certified IDR entity fee as compensation unless the parties settle on an OON rate before a determination.

If the parties settle, the certified IDR entity will return half of each party's fee payment.

10.2.1 Batched Claims, Certified IDR Entity Fee, and Administrative Fee

The certified IDR entities may make different payment determinations for each qualified IDR item or service in a batched claim dispute. In such cases, the party with the fewest determinations in its favor is considered the non-prevailing party and is responsible for paying the certified IDR entity fee.

The certified IDR entity will collect a single administrative fee from each of the parties for batched claims.

10.2.2 Bundled Payments

Bundled payment arrangements are when a plan pays a provider one payment amount for multiple items and services. Bundled payment arrangements are subject to the rules for batched determinations, but the certified IDR entity fee and administrative fee will be the same as for single determinations.

11. Confidentiality Requirements

While conducting the Federal IDR Process, a certified IDR entity will be entrusted with individually identifiable health information (IIHI). The certified IDR entity must comply with the confidentiality requirements applicable to certified IDR entities, including provisions regarding privacy, security, and breach notification under 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(e)(2)(v), 29 CFR

2590.716-8(e)(2)(v), and 45 CFR 149.510(e)(2)(v), and the Independent Dispute Resolution Entity Certification Agreement (the “Agreement”). Failure to comply with these privacy and security measures may result in immediate revocation of an IDR entity’s certification and may prevent the IDR entity from future certification and participation in the program, subject to the appeals process.

11.1 Privacy

The certified IDR entity may create, collect, handle, disclose, transmit, access, maintain, store, and/or use IIHI to perform its required duties, when required to do so.

11.2 Security

Certified IDR entities are required to maintain the security of the IIHI they obtain by: ensuring the confidentiality of all IIHI they create, obtain, maintain, store, and transmit; protecting against any reasonably anticipated threats or hazards to the security of this information; protecting against any reasonably anticipated unauthorized uses or disclosures of this information; and ensuring compliance by any of their personnel who have access to IIHI, including their contractors and subcontractors (as applicable).

Certified IDR entities are required to have policies and procedures in place to properly use and disclose IIHI, identify when IIHI should be destroyed or disposed of, properly store and maintain confidentiality of IIHI that is accessed or stored electronically, and identify the steps the certified IDR entities will take in the event of a breach regarding IIHI.

Certified IDR entities must securely destroy or dispose of IIHI in an appropriate and reasonable manner 6 years from either the date of its creation or the first date on which the certified IDR entity had access to it, whichever is earlier. In determining what is appropriate and reasonable, certified IDR entities should assess potential risks to participant, beneficiary, or enrollee privacy, as well as consider such issues as the form, type, and amount of IIHI to be disposed of. In general, shredding, burning, pulping, or pulverizing paper records so that IIHI is rendered unreadable, indecipherable, and otherwise cannot be reconstructed; and, for IIHI contained on electronic media, clearing (using software or hardware products to overwrite media with non-sensitive data), purging (degaussing or exposing the media to a strong magnetic field in order to disrupt the recorded magnetic domains), or destroying the media (disintegration, pulverization, melting, incinerating, or shredding) may be reasonable methods of disposal.

When IIHI is stored by the certified IDR entity, it must periodically review, assess, and modify the security controls implemented to ensure the continued effectiveness of those controls and the protection of IIHI.

Certified IDR entities must develop and utilize secure electronic interfaces when transmitting IIHI electronically, including through data transmission through the Federal IDR portal, and between disputing parties and the certified IDR entity during the Federal IDR Process.

The certified IDR entity must implement and follow policies and procedures for: guarding against, detecting, and reporting malicious software; monitoring log-in attempts and reporting discrepancies; creating, changing, and safeguarding passwords; and protecting IIHI from

improper alteration or destruction. The certified IDR entity must also implement policies and procedures for the administrative, technical, and physical safeguards for electronic information systems that maintain IIHI to allow access only to those persons or software programs that have been granted access rights.

All confidentiality requirements applicable to certified IDR entities also apply to certified IDR entities' contractors and subcontractors performing any duties related to the Federal IDR Process with access to IIHI. For example, if a breach rises to the level of requiring notification (as described in Section 11.3), the contractor or subcontractors must notify the certified IDR entity, at the time they determine there is a potential breach, to inform it of the risk assessment results (as described in Section 11.3), and the certified IDR entity must notify the Departments, or OPM if an FEHB Carrier is involved.

The Departments reserve the right to audit certified IDR entity privacy and security protocols to ensure they are operating in compliance with regulatory and contractual requirements.

11.3 Breach Notification

Please refer to the Agreement for detailed instructions, definitions, and legal requirements regarding breaches.

Certified IDR entities must report any actual or suspected breach of unsecured IIHI to the CMS IT Service Desk by telephone (1-800-562-1963 or 410-786-2580) or email at cms_it_service_desk@cms.hhs.gov and must also contact the Information Security and Privacy Group by emailing ACASecurityandPrivacy@cms.hhs.gov within 24 hours of discovery of an actual or suspected breach. Incidents must be reported to the CMS IT Service Desk and the Information Security and Privacy Group by the same means as breaches within 72 hours of from discovery of the actual or suspected incident.¹⁶

Within five business days of discovery of an actual or suspected breach, the certified IDR entity must conduct a risk assessment to determine whether it is likely or unlikely that the IIHI was compromised based on the nature of the IIHI, the unauthorized person who received (or may have received) it, the acquisition or use of the IIHI, and any steps taken to mitigate the effects of the breach; it must also prepare and submit a written document describing all information relevant to the risk assessment, including a description of the breach, a description of the risk assessment conducted by the certified IDR entity, and the results of the risk assessment. The written risk assessment must be submitted to the Departments (and OPM, if applicable), through the Federal IDR portal; to the CMS IT Service Desk at cms_it_service_desk@cms.hhs.gov; and to the Information Security and Privacy Group at ACASecurityandPrivacy@cms.hhs.gov. If necessary, certified IDR entities may also make a verbal report of the results of its risk assessment to the CMS IT Service Desk by telephone (1-800-562-1963 or 410-786-2580).

¹⁶ "Breach" of IIHI is defined in 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(a)(2)(ii), 29 CFR 2590.716-8(a)(2)(ii), and 45 CFR 149.510(a)(2)(ii). "Security incident" or "incident" has the meaning contained in OMB Memoranda M 17-12 (January 3, 2017) and means an occurrence that, in relation to a certified IDR Entity's information technology system that stores and maintains unsecured IIHI: (1) actually or imminently jeopardizes, without lawful authority, the integrity, confidentiality, or availability of information or the information system; or (2) constitutes a violation or imminent threat of violation of law, security policies, security procedures, or acceptable use policies.

If the risk assessment results in a determination that the risk that the IIHI was compromised is greater than ‘low,’ the certified IDR entity must provide notification of the breach without unreasonable delay, and in no case later than 60 calendar days after the discovery of the breach, to: the Departments (and OPM, if applicable); the plan, as applicable; the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services, as applicable; and each individual whose unsecured IIHI has been, or is reasonably believed to have been, subject to the breach.

12. Revocation of Certification

The Departments may revoke certification if it is determined that the certified IDR entity:

1. Has a pattern or practice of noncompliance with the requirements applicable to certified IDR entities under the Federal IDR Process;
2. Is operating in a manner that hinders the efficient and effective administration of the Federal IDR Process;
3. No longer meets the applicable standards for certification, including having violated the confidentiality provisions set forth in Section 11;
4. Has committed or participated in fraudulent or abusive activities, including submission of false or fraudulent data to the Departments;
5. Lacks the financial viability to provide arbitration under the Federal IDR Process;
6. Has failed to comply with requests from the Departments made as part of an audit, including failing to submit all records of the certified IDR entity that pertain to its activities within the Federal IDR Process; and
7. Is otherwise no longer fit or qualified to make determinations.

The Departments will issue a written notice of revocation to the certified IDR entity within **10 business days** of the Departments’ decision. To appeal the notice of revocation, the certified IDR entity must submit a request for appeal to the Departments within **30 business days** of the date of the notice. During this time period, the Departments will not issue a final notice of revocation, and a certified IDR entity may continue to work on previously assigned determinations but may not accept new determinations.

12.1 Procedures after Final Revocation for Incomplete Determinations

Upon notice of final revocation, the IDR entity shall not be considered a certified IDR entity and therefore shall not be eligible to accept payment determinations under the Federal IDR Process. Moreover, the IDR entity must cease conducting any ongoing payment determinations (if applicable), which will be reassigned to an appropriate certified IDR entity by the Departments. The IDR entity must agree to these terms as part of entering into the Agreement.

12.2. Certified IDR Entity and Administrative Entity Fees for Incomplete Determinations

In the event the previously certified IDR entity has any remaining ongoing payment determinations at the time of revocation of its certification, the IDR entity must also refund all previously paid certified IDR entity fees and any administrative fees related to the ongoing payment determinations to the parties, who shall pay the certified IDR entity and administrative fees to the appropriate reassigned certified IDR entity selected by the Departments.

Appendix A– Definitions

- (1) “***Batched items and services***” means multiple qualified IDR items or services that are considered jointly as part of one payment determination by a certified IDR entity for purposes of the Federal IDR Process. In order for a qualified IDR item or service to be included in a batched item or service, the qualified IDR item or service must meet the criteria set forth in 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(c)(3), 29 CFR 2590.716-8(c)(3), and 45 CFR 149.510(c)(3).
- (2) “***Certified IDR entity***” means an entity responsible for conducting determinations under 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(c), 29 CFR 2590.716-8(c), and 45 CFR 149.510(c) that meets the certification criteria specified in 26 CFR 54.9816-8T(e), 29 CFR 2590.716-8(e), and 45 CFR 149.510(e) and that has been certified by the Departments.
- (3) “***Clean claim***” generally means a claim that has no defect, impropriety or special circumstance, including incomplete documentation that delays timely payment.
- (4) “***Conflict of interest***” means, with respect to a party to a payment determination or a certified IDR entity, a material relationship, status, or condition of the party or certified IDR entity that impacts the ability of a certified IDR entity to make an unbiased and impartial payment determination. For purposes of this Section, a conflict of interest exists when a certified IDR entity is:
 - (A) A group health plan; a health insurance issuer offering group health insurance coverage, individual health insurance coverage, or short-term, limited-duration insurance; a carrier offering a health benefits plan under 5 U.S.C. 8902; or a provider, a facility or a provider of air ambulance services;
 - (B) An affiliate or a subsidiary of a group health plan; a health insurance issuer offering group health insurance coverage, individual health insurance coverage, or short-term, limited-duration insurance; a carrier offering a health benefits plan under 5 U.S.C. 8902; or a provider, a facility, or a provider of air ambulance services;
 - (C) An affiliate or subsidiary of a professional or trade association representing group health plans; health insurance issuers offering group health insurance coverage, individual health insurance coverage, or short-term, limited-duration insurance; FEHB Carriers offering a health benefits plan under 5 U.S.C. 8902; or providers, facilities, or providers of air ambulance services.
 - (D) A certified IDR entity that has or that has any personnel, contractors, or subcontractors assigned to a determination who have, a material familial, financial, or professional relationship with a party to the payment determination being disputed, or with any officer, director, or management employee of the plan, issuer, or carrier offering a health benefits plan under 5 U.S.C. 8902; the plan (or coverage) administrator, plan (or coverage) fiduciaries, or plan, issuer, or carrier employees; the health care provider, the health care provider's group or practice association; the provider of air ambulance services, the provider of air ambulance services' group or practice association, or the facility that is a party to the dispute.

- (5) “**Health care facility (facility)**” means with respect to a group health plan or group health insurance coverage, in the context of non-emergency services, each of the following: (1) a hospital (as defined in Section 1861(e) of the Social Security Act); (2) a hospital outpatient department; (3) a critical access hospital (as defined in Section 1861(mm)(1) of the Social Security Act); or (4) an ambulatory surgical center described in Section 1833(i)(1)(A) of the Social Security Act.
- (6) “**Individually identifiable health information (IIHI)**” means any information, including demographic data, that relates to the past, present, or future physical or mental health or condition of an individual; the provision of health care to an individual; or the past, present, or future payment for the provision of health care to an individual; and that identifies the individual; or with respect to which there is a reasonable basis to believe the information can be used to identify the individual.
- (7) “**Material familial relationship**” means any relationship as a spouse, domestic partner, child, parent, sibling, spouse’s or domestic partner’s parent, spouse’s or domestic partner’s sibling, spouse’s or domestic partner’s child, child’s parent, child’s spouse or domestic partner, or sibling’s spouse or domestic partner.
- (8) “**Material financial relationship**” means any financial interest of more than five percent of total annual revenue or total annual income of a certified IDR entity or an officer, director, or manager thereof, or of a reviewer or reviewing physician employed or engaged by a certified IDR entity to conduct or participate in any review in the Federal IDR Process. The terms annual revenue and annual income do not include mediation fees received by mediators who are also arbitrators, provided that the mediator acts in the capacity of a mediator and does not represent a party in the mediation.
- (9) “**Material professional relationship**” means any physician-patient relationship, any partnership or employment relationship, any shareholder or similar ownership interest in a professional corporation, partnership, or other similar entity; or any independent contractor arrangement that constitutes a material financial relationship with any expert used by the certified IDR entity or any officer or director of the certified IDR entity.
- (10) “**Physician or health care provider (provider)**” means a physician or other health care provider who is acting within the scope of practice of that provider’s license or certification under applicable State law, but does not include a provider of air ambulance services.
- (11) “**Qualified IDR item or service**” means an item or service that is either an emergency service from an OON provider or facility, an item or service furnished by an OON provider at an in-network health care facility subject to the requirements of the NSA, or air ambulance services furnished by a provider of air ambulance services, for which the provider or facility (as applicable) or provider of air ambulance services or plan, issuer, or FEHB carrier submits a valid Notice of IDR Initiation. For the notification to be valid, the open negotiation period must have lapsed without agreement on the payment amount.

- (12) “**Qualifying Payment Amount**” generally means the median of contracted rates for a specific item or service in the same geographic region within the same insurance market, increased by an inflation index. For more on the methodology for calculation the qualifying payment amount see [here](#).¹⁷
- (13) “**Service code**” means the code that identifies and describes an item or service using the Current Procedural Terminology (CPT), Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS), or Diagnosis-Related Group (DRG) codes.

¹⁷ Note that the link is to 29 CFR 2590.716-6, methodology for calculating the QPA for group health plans subject to Department of Labor rules. The corresponding methodology for group and individual health insurance markets subject to the jurisdiction of HHS rules is found at [42 CFR 149.140](#). The corresponding methodology for group health plans subject to the jurisdiction of the Department of the Treasury is found at [26 CFR 54.9816-6T](#).

Appendix B – Detailed Summary of the Federal Independent Dispute Resolution (IDR) Process and Required Notices

PROCESS STEP SUMMARY	FEDERAL MODEL IDR NOTICE
Before the Federal IDR Process:	
1. Covered item or service results in: an OON provider or emergency facility charge, an OON provider charge for items/services at an in-network facility, or an OON charge for air ambulance services.	None
2. Initial payment or notice of denial of payment: Must be sent by the plan to the provider, facility, or provider of air ambulance services not later than <i>30 calendar days</i> after a clean claim is submitted.	None
3. Open negotiation period: Parties must exhaust a <i>30-business-day</i> open negotiation period before either party may initiate the Federal IDR Process. This period must be initiated within <i>30 business days</i> beginning on the day the OON provider receives either an initial payment or a notice of denial of payment for the item or service from the plan,. The open negotiation period begins on the day on which the open negotiation notice is first sent by a party.	Open Negotiation Notice
Federal IDR Process:	
4. IDR initiation: Either party can initiate the Federal IDR Process by submitting a Notice of IDR Initiation to the other party and to the Departments within <i>4 business days</i> after the close of the open negotiation period (or within 30 business days after a cooling-off period, if applicable). Such notice includes the initiating party's preferred certified IDR entity.	Notice of IDR Initiation
<p>5. Selection of certified IDR entity: Once the Federal IDR Process is initiated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Within 3 business days:</i> If the non-initiating party does not object to the initiating party's preferred certified IDR entity (included in the IDR initiation notice), selection defaults to the initiating party's preferred certified IDR entity unless there is a conflict of interest. If non-initiating party objects, it must provide an alternative certified IDR entity to the initiating party. - <i>Within the next business day following the 3-business-day selection period:</i> The initiating party must submit a Notice of Certified IDR Entity Selection indicating agreement (or failure to select a certified IDR entity). Also, if the non-initiating party believes that the Federal IDR Process is not applicable, it must notify the Departments via the Federal IDR portal in the same timeframe. - <i>Within 6 business days from IDR initiation:</i> If the parties cannot agree on selection of a certified IDR entity, the Departments will randomly select a certified IDR entity. <p>Administrative fees are allowed to be billed/invoiced by the certified IDR entity at the time the parties to a payment determination select the certified IDR entity and must be collected by the certified IDR entity from the parties by the time the parties submit their offers. The administrative fee amount will be established in guidance published annually by the Departments (available at https://www.cms.gov/CCIIO/Resources/Regulations-and-Guidance/Downloads/Technical-Guidance-CY2022-Fee-Guidance-Federal-Independent-Dispute-Resolution-Process-NSA.pdf). The certified IDR entity must follow the process for remitting the administrative fees to HHS each month according to HHS guidance.</p>	Notice of Certified IDR Entity Selection (or Failure to Select)*

6. Certified IDR Entity requirements: Following selection, the certified IDR entity must: - <i>Attest on conflicts of interest:</i> The certified IDR entity must attest to meeting the requirements of the conflicts of interest rules or notify the Departments of an inability to meet those requirements within <i>3 business days</i> . - <i>Determination of Federal IDR Process applicability:</i> The certified IDR entity must notify both the Departments and the parties within <i>3 business days</i> if it determines the Federal IDR Process does not apply.	None
7. Submission of offers: Parties must submit their offers not later than <i>10 business days</i> after certified IDR entity selection.	None
8. Payment of Certified IDR Entity fees: Certified IDR entity fees are collected by the certified IDR entity upon submission of the offers.	None
9. Continuing negotiations: The parties may continue to negotiate after initiation of the Federal IDR Process and may reach an agreement before a certified IDR entity makes a determination. If the parties agree to a payment amount after providing the Notice of IDR Initiation, the initiating party must submit a notification to the Departments and the certified IDR entity through the Federal IDR portal, as soon as possible, but not later than <i>3 business days</i> after the date of the agreement.	None
10. Selection of offer: A certified IDR entity has <i>30 business days</i> from its date of selection to select one of the offers submitted and notify the parties, as well as the Departments, of its decision.	None
11. Extenuating circumstances: The parties may request extensions, granted at the Departments' discretion, to most of the time periods above in cases of extenuating circumstances such as matters beyond the control of the parties or for good cause.	Request for Extension due to Extenuating Circumstances
12. Payment: Any amount due from one party to the other party must be paid not later than <i>30 calendar days</i> after the determination by the certified IDR entity. The certified IDR entity must refund the certified IDR entity fee to the applicable party(ies) within <i>30 business days</i> after the determination.	None

*Indicates that a standard Federal notice has not been developed for this step, however, required communication is expected to take place through the Federal IDR portal.

Appendix C– Resources

Model Notices:

- Standard notice & consent forms for nonparticipating providers & emergency facilities regarding consumer consent on balance billing protections ([Download Surprise Billing Protection Form](#)) (PDF)
- Model disclosure notice on patient protections against surprise billing for providers, facilities, health plans and insurers ([Download Patient Rights & Protections Against Surprise Medical Bills](#)) (PDF)
- Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) model notices and information collection requirements for the Federal Independent Dispute Resolution Process ([Download Model Notices and Information Requirements](#))

[IDR Portal](#)

Calendar Year 2022 Fee Guidance for the Federal Independent Dispute Resolution Process Under No Surprises ([Download Fee Information](#)) (PDF)

[Where to go for help](#)