



Program Assistance Letter

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TO: Health Center Program Look-Alikes
Primary Care Associations
Primary Care Organizations
National Cooperative Agreements

The purpose of this Program Assistance Letter (PAL) is to provide information regarding further developments to strengthen and improve the administration of the Health Center Look-Alike Program, a valuable component of the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Health Center Program. The following changes will take place in early 2013.

Oversight and Monitoring. HRSA will transfer oversight and monitoring of all current and newly designated look-alikes to assigned project officers in the Bureau of Primary Health Care's Divisions who are currently responsible for performing these functions with Health Center Program grantees. Integration of look-alikes into current state-based project officer portfolios will allow HRSA to align strategies used to support and oversee all health centers, both grantees and look-alikes, and will create new opportunities to leverage resources and identify opportunities for collaboration. Look-alikes will interact with their assigned project officers through routine project officer monitoring including quarterly calls, application reviews, and in-person site visits.

Technical Assistance. Transferring responsibility for the oversight of HRSA's look-alikes into project officer portfolios will improve HRSA's ability to identify technical assistance needs and provide associated support to maximize the effectiveness of look-alikes. To that end, technical assistance resources, including financial, administrative, and clinical consultation will be available to look-alikes as appropriate.

Look-Alike Compliance Determination. Effective February 1, 2013 HRSA will maintain independent authority for the designation of look-alikes. HRSA will continue to determine look-alikes' compliance with Health Center Program requirements. HRSA will also have final authority to designate new and recertify existing look-alikes and to approve change in scope requests, while the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will continue its authority over Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) payment methodologies and FQHC provider enrollment under Titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act. This change will increase the efficiency of HRSA and CMS processes, reduce the timelines for look-alike application reviews and change in scope requests, and allow look-alikes to be more fully integrated into HRSA's Electronic Handbook (EHB) system.

Notices of Look-Alike Designation. HRSA will begin directly issuing Notices of Look-Alike Designation (NLD) through its EHB in lieu of the CMS initial designation, annual certification, and renewal of designation approval letters. NLDs issued to current look-alikes after February 1, 2013 will establish revised annual certification and designation periods that begin on the first day of the month following the month in which they were originally assigned, and all HRSA reporting requirements will be adjusted accordingly (e.g., if a look-alike's current designation period begins on February 12, it will be adjusted to begin on March 1 with the next NLD is issued). NLDs will contain other important information about terms of look-alike designation and may include additional information resulting from the application review process.

Look-Alike Benefits. The changes described in this PAL will not affect current look-alikes' designation status, eligibility for participation under related programs, or the requirement to maintain compliance with Health Center Program requirements. As required by Federal statute, look-alikes will continue to be ineligible for Health Center Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) malpractice insurance.

HRSA is committed to providing the support necessary for all look-alikes to continue their important mission and fulfill their critical role in the safety net system in a rapidly changing health care environment. HRSA will provide additional details as other program changes evolve. In the meantime, we welcome your thoughts and feedback and thank you for the important work you do in the communities you serve.

If you have questions or feedback about this PAL or look-alikes in general, please contact the Office of Policy and Program Development at (301) 594-4300 or at lookalike@hrsa.gov.

/s/

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