

## What is Meaningful Use (MU)?

### The EHR Incentive Program and Meaningful Use

The term “meaningful use” (MU) has become synonymous with the Electronic Health Record (EHR) Incentive Program. The EHR Incentive program was implemented by CMS in 2011 to encourage providers to use EHR technology to positively impact patient care. The program provides monetary incentives to eligible professionals (EPs) to utilize certified EHR systems not only record patient data, but to also utilize patient data to achieve certain benchmarks and improve patient care. The program uses a two-pronged approach to encourage providers to “meaningfully use” their certified EHR systems: incentive payments; and payment adjustments.

Incentive payments were offered as a way to help offset the cost physicians encountered in implementing EHR systems. In order to qualify for the incentive payments, providers must have shown they were “meaningfully using” their EHRs by meeting reporting criteria established by CMS. Those professionals that successfully demonstrated meaningful use prior to 2015 received incentive payments ranging anywhere from \$43,720 to \$23,520, depending upon the year they started participating in the program and the number of years they were able to successfully show meaningful use. 2014 was the last year physicians could qualify for incentive payments, and providers starting the program after 2014 will not receive incentive payments for participating. Return to top.

The second component of the EHR Incentive Program is payment reductions for those not participating in the program. Beginning in 2015, EP’s who do not successfully demonstrate meaningful use will be subject to a payment reduction that starts at 1%. The reduction increases each year that the EP’s do not demonstrate meaningful use, to a possible maximum of -5% in 2019, depending upon the percentage of eligible professionals who are participating in the program. EPs successfully demonstrating meaningful use will continue to receive full reimbursement from CMS.

### Demonstrating Meaningful Use

There are several stages involved in demonstrating meaningful use. The first stage requires reporting core and menu data for 90 days during the first year of participation. The exact requirements of what data must be reported is dependent on whether or not the EP has successfully implemented 2014 Certified Electronic Health Record Technology (2014 CEHRT). The CMS website contains details on the [current definitions of Stage 1](#) based on CEHRT status. Note that EPs who have not been able to meet the 2014 CEHRT will have a different set of guidelines.

Clinical quality measures (CQMs) must also be reported in order to demonstrate meaningful use. The CMS website has the most [recent information on CQM requirements](#) based on CEHRT status.

Once an EP has successfully completed Stage 1 he or she may move on to the Stage 2 of demonstrating meaningful use. The CMS website contains up to date information on [Stage 2 requirements](#). As with Stage 1, the requirements for Stage 2 have been modified to accommodate EPs that have not been able to successfully implement 2014 CEHRT. CMS has also modified Stage 2 to require 90 days of reporting instead of the previously required full year.

Proposed rules for [Stage 3](#) of meaningful use were published by CMS on March 30, 2015. The comment period will close on May 29, 2015. According to CMS, the rules give more flexibility and simplify requirements for providers by focusing on advanced use of electronic health records and eliminating requirements that are no longer relevant.

**NOTE:** CMS recently extended its deadline to attest to meaningful use for 2014 from February 28, 2015 to March 20, 2015. Watch for notices from the AAN and/or CMS that might impact future deadlines and reporting requirements. [Back to top.](#)

#### **Additional Resources on the EHR Incentive Program and Meaningful Use:**

AAN Website: <https://www.aan.com/go/practice/pay>

CMS Website: <http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Legislation/EHRIncentivePrograms/index.html>