Fraud Laws and Whistleblower Rights and Protections

Policy Number: M111103166
Effective Date: 1/1/2007
Sponsoring Department: Compliance
Impacted Department(s): All

Type of Policy: ☒ Internal  ☒ External

Applies to (Line of Business):
☒ Corporate (All)
☐ State Products, if yes which plan(s): □MediSource/FHP; □Child Health Plus
☐ Medicare, if yes, which plan(s): □MAPD; □PDP/EGWP
☐ Commercial, if yes, which type: □Large Group; □Small Group; □Individual

Excluded Products within the Selected Lines of Business (LOB)
N/A

Applicable to Vendors?  Yes ☒ No ☐

Purpose and Applicability:
To explain the Federal and State laws about false and fraudulent claims and the penalties associated with false and fraudulent claims. To explain the legal remedies and protections available to whistleblowers who make reports to the Government about false and fraudulent claims.

RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENTS: Special Investigations Unit (SIU), Legal, Compliance

Policy:
Independent Health has a comprehensive fraud and abuse program which is led by its Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and is designed to detect, correct, prevent and report potentially illegal and fraudulent practices. One facet of Independent Health’s comprehensive fraud and abuse program provides our employees and contractors and their employees with detailed, educational information about a few of the fraud and abuse laws we are governed and required by law to...
follow. Collectively, these laws and rules create a framework for Federal and State Governments to detect and prevent fraud and abuse in the health care system and to protect the individuals and entities who provide information to the Government about such fraud and abuse. This policy contains important information about Federal and State fraud and abuse laws and whistleblower protection laws.

**If you are an employee of Independent Health**, additional information about these laws can be obtained by contacting the Legal Department. Independent Health's fraud and abuse-related policies and business processes are posted on the Insider under Corporate Policies & Procedures and SIU Fraud and Abuse. Employees who believe they have encountered fraud or a violation of law or any questionable activity are required to report it to the Special Investigations Unit at 1-800-665-1182.

**If you are a contractor of Independent Health or an employee of a contractor of Independent Health**, this information is provided to you to comply with Section 6032 of the United States Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, certain Medicare laws, rules, regulations and requirements under the Medicare Part D Program, as well as other Federal and State laws. If you believe you have encountered fraud related to your business dealings with Independent Health, we encourage you to report the information to us by contacting Independent Health’s SIU at 1-800-665-1182. Also, please review this policy. If you would like more information about the laws described in this document, please consult with your attorney.

**Federal Law:**

**Federal False Claims Act**

- **Direct False Claims**: A civil lawsuit can be brought by the United States Government against any person who knowingly makes a false claim to obtain money or property, any part of which is provided to the Government directly or indirectly to a person, agent or contractor of the Government, a grantee of the Government or a recipient of any money or property from the Government.

- **False Records**: A civil lawsuit can be brought by the United States Government against any person who knowingly makes, uses or causes to be made or used, a false record or statement material to a false or fraudulent claim. The word “material” means having a natural tendency to influence, or be capable of influencing the payment or receipt of money or property. In order to make its case, the Government does not have to demonstrate a direct connection between the false record or statement and the Government’s payment of a claim. In addition, a person or entity can be held responsible for damages in the amount of $50,000 for each false record or statement.

- **Underpayments**: A civil lawsuit can be brought by the United States Government against any person who knowingly makes underpayments to the Government.

- **Certifications**: A civil lawsuit can be brought by the United States Government against any person who, with intention to defraud the Government, certifies receipt of Government money or property without completely knowing that the receipt is true and correct.
• **Improper Property Transfers:** A civil lawsuit can be brought by the United States Government against any person who knowingly buys or receives as a pledge of an obligation or debt, public property from an officer or employee of the United States Government, who lawfully may not sell or pledge property.

• **Overpayments:** An overpayment means a health plan receives funds under the Medicare or Medicaid program and, after appropriate reconciliation; it retains them even though it is not entitled to do that. Under the Federal False Claims Act, Independent Health must report and return Overpayments to the Secretary of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, New York State, a Government intermediary, carrier or **contractor** within 60 days of the date the overpayment was identified or the date any corresponding cost report is due, if any. When Independent Health returns an overpayment, it must include a written statement indicating the reason why the overpayment is being returned. A civil lawsuit can be brought by the Government against any person who knowingly retains an Overpayment when there was an obligation to repay the Government. This part of the False Claims Act is often referred to as a “reverse false claim.”

• **Anti-Kickback Law Claims:** The Anti-Kickback Law is discussed in more detail later in this policy under the heading entitled “Federal Health Care Program Anti-Kickback Law.” There are times when a violation of the Anti-Kickback Law will also be considered a violation of the Federal False Claims Act. Penalties will be assessed under both Federal laws.

• **Conspiracy:** A lawsuit can also be brought against any person who conspires to commit any of the acts just described in this section.

**Important Definitions in the Federal False Claims Act:**

• A “claim” means any request or demand, whether under a contract or otherwise, for money or property and regardless of whether the Government has title to the property that is presented to the Government or to a Government **contractor**, grantee or other recipient if the money or property is going to be spent on the Government’s behalf or in a way that advances any Government program or interest. This is an extremely broad definition.

• Knowingly" means the person:
  1. Has actual knowledge of the information;
  2. Acts in deliberate ignorance of the truth or falsity of the information; or
  3. Acts in reckless disregard for the truth or falsity of the information.

• To make a case against an individual or entity, the Government only has to prove that the **fraud** against the Government occurred. The Government does not have to prove the person or entity had a specific mental state or intention to defraud the Government.

**Damages under the Federal False Claims Act:**

The person can be held responsible for damages for: up to three times the amount of the damage the Government sustains plus mandatory penalties ranging from $5,000 to $10,000 (these penalty
ranges can be adjusted for inflation) plus the costs of any civil lawsuit brought against him or her by the Government.

**Some examples of potentially problematic activities under the Federal False Claims Act:**

- Knowingly falsifying records that are then used to get a false claim paid (please note, the potential penalty for this type of violation is $50,000 for each false record or statement).
- Double billing.
- Submitting bills for services that were never performed.
- Retention of an overpayment where there is an obligation to repay.
- Inaccurately reporting or certifying data in bids and rate proposals.
- Using inaccurate data to support reported claims experience and loss ratios.
- Failing to correctly report rating or discounts for similarly sized subscriber groups under Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB).
- Falsely certifying compliance with Medicaid Managed Care marketing or other program requirements.
- Manipulating provider or vendor dealings to distort reported claims experience in our government programs.
- Making any false statement, omission or misrepresentation in any application, bid or contract to participate in Medicare Advantage, Medicare Part D plan or Medicaid Managed Care (please note, the potential penalty for this type of violation is $50,000 for each false statement or misrepresentation and not more than three times the total amount claimed for each item or service for which payments were received and was based on the application which contained the false statement).

**Administrative Remedies for False Claims and Statements:**

Another false claims provision that works together with the Federal False Claims Act is the Program Fraud and Civil Remedies Act. This provision expands the damages listed above so that a person who knowingly submits a false claim is liable for a civil penalty of up to $5,000 for each false claim submitted and may also be subject to an “assessment” of up to twice the amount of each false claim submitted. The United States Attorney General’s Office is responsible for investigating the allegations, filing the action, holding hearings, issuing subpoenas and collecting the penalties assessed.

**Federal False Claims Act Qui Tam Lawsuits:**

The Federal False Claims Act allows "qui tam" actions. These lawsuits are brought on behalf of the Government by an employee, a contractor or one of Independent Health’s agents who knows about the fraud. The individual sues as an individual and on behalf of the Government.

The individual who brings the lawsuit is called a "whistleblower" or a “qui tam relator.”

- **How this works:** The individual files a lawsuit on behalf of the Government in a federal district court "under seal." “Under seal” means the lawsuit will be confidential when the Government investigates it and decides whether to join in the lawsuit. If the
Government joins in the lawsuit, the lawsuit will be directed by the United States Department of Justice. If the Government does not join the lawsuit, the individual will continue to lead the lawsuit.

- **When:** Qui tam lawsuits must be filed by the individual within six years of the alleged violation or no more than three years after the date the Government knows or reasonably should know about the alleged violation, but in no event more than 10 years after the violation was committed.

- **Awards:** If the Government joins in the lawsuit and the lawsuit is successful, the individual may receive between 15% and 25% of the proceeds of the lawsuit. If the Government does not join in the lawsuit and the lawsuit is successful, the individual may receive between 25% and 30% of the proceeds.

- **Special Protections:** In addition to the financial awards provided to the individual, the Federal False Claims Act strives to make the individual whole and provide them with all relief necessary to do that such as reinstatement with the same seniority status, two times the amount of back pay (plus interest) and other special compensation due to the employer’s retaliatory conduct (or the business partner’s retaliatory conduct) against the individual for filing the qui tam lawsuit, such as litigation costs and reasonable attorney’s fees.

**Federal Health Care Program Anti-Kickback Law:**

Individuals and entities can be held liable under the Federal health care program anti-kickback law ("Anti-Kickback Law") for knowingly and willfully offering, paying, soliciting or receiving remuneration in exchange for referring, furnishing, purchasing, leasing or ordering any good, facility, service or item that is paid for in whole or in part by Medicare or Medicaid programs or other Federal health care programs. Both the recipient of the remuneration and the individual or entity who offers the remuneration is subject to the Anti-Kickback Law.

**Remuneration:** Remuneration means any kickback, bribe, discount, rebate made in cash or in kind, regardless of whether it was paid directly or indirectly. The Government defines the word remuneration very broadly. Remuneration that is intended to induce referrals is banned and so is remuneration that is intended to induce the purchasing, leasing, ordering or arranging for any good, facility, service or item paid for by a Federal health care program.

- **Exceptions:** The Government has issued regulations that create a list of practices that do not violate the Anti-Kickback Law. These practices are commonly referred to as “safe harbors.” The safe harbors cover a small number of payment practices such as:
  - The waiver of coinsurance and deductible amounts under certain specific conditions.
  - Giving incentives to individuals to promote the delivery of preventive care.
  - Remuneration which promotes access to care and which poses a low risk of harm to patients and Federal health care programs.
  - Offering or transferring coupons and rebates or other retailer rewards for free or less than fair market value if certain conditions are met,
Offering or transferring items or services for free or less than market value if: (a) they are not offered through an advertisement, (b) they are not tied to an item or service that is reimbursable under a federal or state health care program, (c) there is a reasonable connection between the items or services offered and the individual’s medical care, (d) the individual receiving the item or service is in financial need,

As of January 1, 2011, the waiver of any copayment for the first prescription fill of a generic drug that is covered by Medicare Part D.

These are narrow exceptions to the Anti-Kickback Law’s prohibited practices. If you would like more information about the Anti-Kickback Law’s safe harbors, please contact an attorney in the Legal Department. If you are a contractor of Independent Health, please consult with your attorney.

**Damages:** A person or entity can be held criminally and/or civilly liable for violating the Anti-Kickback Law. The criminal penalty is a fine of up to $25,000 and/or imprisonment of up to five years. An Anti-Kickback Law violator can also be excluded from participation in a Federal health care program. On the civil side, a person or entity can be required to pay the Government up to three times the amount of the total remuneration offered, paid, solicited or received plus a $50,000 fine for each violation of the Anti-Kickback Law.

**Self Reporting Violations:**

As a contractor of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (“CMS”) for various Medicare products. Independent Health must report to the HHS Office of the Inspector General in writing and send a carbon copy to the CMS official in charge of Independent Health’s contract with CMS when it has credible evidence that one of its officers, directors, employees, agents or Medicare-related subcontractors has violated:

- Federal criminal law involving fraud, conflict of interest, bribery or gratuity violations in Title 18 of the United States Code; or
- The Federal False Claims Act.

When making such reports to the Government, Independent Health shall mark each page of its written report as “Confidential.”

**Federal Audits:**

Federal law permits the HHS to audit Independent Health for potential violations of a variety of Federal fraud laws, regulations and rules. If Independent Health does not grant the Government timely access to our facilities, records and systems so they can perform their audits, investigations and evaluations, Independent Health can be subject to a penalty in the amount of $15,000 per day.

**New York State Law**

**New York False Claims Act**

A civil lawsuit can be brought by the New York State Attorney General and or any local Government against any person who does any of the following activities:
• Knowingly presenting a false claim to the State or a local Government or a Medicaid Managed Care plan;
• Knowingly making use of a false record to receive payment from the State or a local Government or a Medicaid Managed Care plan;
• Conspiring to defraud the State or a local Government by getting a claim paid;
• Delivering, or causing to be delivered, to the State or a local Government less property or money than the amount for which a person receives a Certificate of Receipt, with an intent to defraud or willfully to conceal the property or money;
• Making or delivering, with intent to defraud, a certifying receipt to the State or local Government without completely knowing that the information on the receipt is true;
• Knowingly buying or receiving as a pledge of an obligation or debt, public property from a State officer or employee knowing that the property may not be lawfully sold or pledged; and
• Knowingly making, using or causing to be used a false record or statement to conceal, avoid or decrease an obligation of money or property to the State or a local Government.

**Damages:** The person can be held responsible for damages for: (1) a civil penalty of $6,000 to $12,000 paid to the State, (2) three times the amount of damages the State suffers (“treble damages”), (3) three times the amount of damages any local Government suffers; and (4) the cost of any civil lawsuits and attorney’s fees brought to recover any such penalties and damages. A court may reduce treble damages to double damages if: (1) the violator furnishes all information to the officials who are investigating the violation within 30 days of the violator obtaining that information; (2) the violator fully cooperates with the Government’s investigation; and (3) at the time the violator provides the information, no criminal, civil or administrative action had begun and the violator did not have actual knowledge of any investigation.

**New York False Claims Act Qui Tam Lawsuits:**

Similar to the Federal False Claims Act, the State False Claims also allows “qui tam” actions. These lawsuits are brought by an individual who knows about the fraud. This individual is called a “whistleblower” or a “qui tam relator.” The Government works with the individual and decides whether to get involved in the lawsuit.

- **How this works:** The individual files a lawsuit in New York State Supreme Court, a trial level court of law. The individual’s complaint is “sealed” and kept confidential for at least 60 days. During that period of time, the Government will investigate the complaint and decide whether to get involved in the case. The Government may either: (1) take over the case completely and re-file the lawsuit in the name of the State of New York; (2) join in the lawsuit and help the individual who filed the lawsuit; or (3) decide not to participate at all. If the Government joins in the case, the Government will try the case to its completion or settle the case. The court will determine if a settlement is fair before it is finalized.

- **When:** Qui tam lawsuits must be filed by the individual within six years of the violation or three years after the date facts that are material to the case are known or reasonably should have been known to the Government official charged with the responsibility to act in the circumstances, whichever occurs last. In no event may the lawsuit be brought later than 10 years after the violation was committed.
• **Awards:** If the Government gets involved in the lawsuit and the lawsuit is successful, the individual is entitled to 15%–25% of the total recovery or the settlement. If the Government does not get involved in the lawsuit and the lawsuit is successful, the individual is entitled to 25%–30% of the total recovery or the settlement. The court may also award reasonable costs and expenses, including attorney’s fees. An individual’s recovery may be reduced to 10% of the proceeds of the lawsuit or a settlement if the court finds that the lawsuit was based mainly on disclosures from someone other than the individual who started the lawsuit which are connected to allegations in a criminal, civil or administrative hearing or in a legislative or administrative report, hearing audit, or investigation or from the news media.

• **Antiretaliation Protections:** If an employer discharges, demotes, suspends, threatens, harasses or is otherwise discriminated against one of its employees for filing a State False Claims Act lawsuit, the employee is entitled to all relief necessary to put the person in the position he or she was in before the discrimination. For example, the employee may be entitled to reinstatement to a position he or she would have had if the discrimination did not occur or two times the amount of back-pay. An employee may file another lawsuit to get the relief needed to make him or her whole.

### Unacceptable Practices Under Medicaid:

New York State law makes knowingly submitting a false statement and claim a Class A misdemeanor under the New York State criminal law. New York law also lists certain prohibited practices for companies and individuals involved in providing benefits or services to Medicaid recipients. The unacceptable practices include, but are not limited to:

- Making false claims for medical care or services;
- Making false statements relating to claims for payment for medical services or supplies;
- Failing to disclose information about the right to payment;
- Taking a medical assistance payment and using it for something other than medical assistance;
- Taking bribes and kickbacks and inappropriate referrals;
- Unacceptable recordkeeping practices;
- Submitting claims or accepting payments for medical care, services or supplies offered by a person who is not qualified to participate in the Medicaid program;
- Receiving additional payments for services or supplies for which a Medicaid claim has been made;
- Deceiving a Medicaid recipient in any way;
- Furnishing excessive medical care, services or supplies to a Medicaid recipient;
- Any conspiracy to do any the activities listed above; and
- Unlawful discrimination against a Medicaid recipient.

### Recovery of Overpayments in the Medicaid Program:

The New York State Department of Health (DOH) is authorized to recover fraudulent overpayments, unauthorized payments and otherwise inappropriate payments made in connection with Medicaid. In some cases the DOH is authorized to recover the amount of the overpayment and impose a monetary penalty, while in other cases the DOH may only recover the overpayment or impose a penalty. When
the DOH recovers overpayments, it may only recover the amount of the claim. If the DOH imposes a penalty, the penalty cannot exceed $10,000. Although, this $10,000 limit can increase to $30,000 in cases where the DOH has penalized the same individual during the previous five year time frame.

**Fraud Against a Health Plan:**

New York State criminal law contains specific provisions about fraud against health plans. To be guilty of healthcare fraud against a health plan, a person must do the following:

- Act with intent to defraud a health plan;
- Knowingly and willfully provide materially false information or omit information to request payments from a health plan for a healthcare item or service; and
- Actually receive a payment he or she or another person is not entitled to receive.

If a person’s actions satisfy those three elements, the person can be found guilty of healthcare fraud in the 5th degree, which is a Class A misdemeanor. There are four other levels of healthcare fraud which increase in severity based on the commission of healthcare fraud in the 5th degree plus the amount of money the person receives from the health plan because of the fraud. The other levels of healthcare fraud (“HCF”) against a New York health plan are listed below:

- HCF in the 4th degree means 5th degree HCF plus receipt of $3,000 from the health plan.
- HCF in the 3rd degree means 5th degree HCF plus receipt of more than $10,000 from the health plan.
- HCF in the 2nd degree means 5th degree HCF plus receipt of more than $50,000 from the health plan.
- HCF in the 1st degree means 5th degree HCF plus receipt of more than $1,000,000 from the health plan.

**New York Whistleblower Protections (No Retaliation):**

New York law prevents an employer from retaliating against any employee for disclosing or threatening to disclose to a supervisor or a public body any activity, policy or practice of the employer that violates a law and presents a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety or which constitutes healthcare fraud. This is an anti-retaliation provision and it only applies if the employee has brought the issue to the attention of his or her supervisor and gave the employer a reasonable opportunity to correct the activity, policy or practice.

- **Remedies for the Employee:** An employee who was retaliated against by an employer may bring a civil lawsuit in a New York State court against his/her employer within one year after the alleged retaliatory conduct. If the employee wins the lawsuit, a court may require the employer: (1) to stop the alleged violation of law, policy or practice; (2) to reinstate the employee to his or her prior employment position; (3) to reinstate the employee’s benefits and
seniority rights; (4) to offer the employee full compensation for lost wages, benefits and other remuneration; and, or (5) to pay the employee's reasonable costs and attorney's fees.

Definitions

Abuse is any incident or practice of a provider, physician or supplier which, although not usually considered fraudulent, is inconsistent with accepted and sound medical, business or fiscal practices and directly or indirectly results in services that fail to meet professionally-recognized standards of care or, in some cases, may be medically unnecessary.

Fraud is an intentional deception or misrepresentation that the individual or entity makes knowing that the misrepresentation could result in some unauthorized benefit to the individual, or the entity, or to some other party.

Government means either the Federal Government or the State Government respectively.

Vendor or contractor means an external entity that provides goods and services to Independent Health under a valid, written and executed agreement.

References

Related Policies, Processes and Other Documents
Enter name of all Independent Health policies, processes or other documents that relates or that is referenced with within this policy.

Regulatory References

- 28 C.F.R. § 85.3
- 42 C.F.R. § 422.503(b)(4)(vi)(Medicare Advantage Program Regulations)
- 42 C.F.R. § 1001.952, et. seq.
- 42 U.S.C. §§ 1320a-7, 1320a-7a, 1320a-7b(b),
U.S.C. §1320a-7(b)(16) (g) and (h), 42 U.S.C. §1320a-7a(a)(8) and (9), (i)(6)(F)-(I), 18 U.S.C. §1347(b)).

- 48 C.F.R. §52.203-13(b)(3)
- N.Y. State Fin. Law § 187-194
- N.Y. Soc. Serv. Law § 366-b and 145-b(4)
- 18 NYCRR § 515.2
- N.Y. Penal Law §§ 177.00 – 177.30
- N.Y. Lab. Law § 740

Version Control

Sponsored By:
Name sponsor: John Mineo
Title of sponsor: SVP – General Counsel
Signature of sponsor: Click here to enter text.

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