



**Situation Overview
(NHII and Data Standards)**

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**New Code Set to Improve Health Industry Efficiencies
and Support Access to the Best of Alternative and Conventional Medicine**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM. August 19, 2003. A simple innovation in health-related data standards could help resolve the financial crisis in U.S. healthcare. It could also help Americans gain access to the best of alternative, complementary and conventional care.

The innovation is a set of codes—similar to universal product codes (UPCs) or bar codes in the grocery industry—that could generate greater efficiencies and expand consumer choice in the health industry. ABC codes—developed by Alternative Link of New Mexico—support integrative healthcare research, management and commerce. They reflect wellness-oriented practices of alternative medicine, nursing and other integrative healthcare professionals and extend the value of older medical code sets that reflect disease-oriented practices of conventional physicians.

By working with and filling gaps in the American Medical Association's Current Procedural Terminology (CPT codes) and the supplemental sections of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Healthcare Common Procedure Coding System (HCPCS Level II codes), ABC codes support direct comparisons between the economic and health outcomes of competing approaches to care. These cost-effectiveness comparisons—which could lead to changes in insurance coverage and reimbursement policies—have important implications for the financing, administration and delivery of healthcare products and services. They could help all healthcare decision makers—including consumers—gain information on the best interventions available. This insight could lead to better healthcare decision-making, a slowdown in escalating healthcare premiums, and—as health benefit dollars are redirected toward other investments—a boost in economic growth.

After the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) transaction and code set compliance date of October 16, 2003, more than a million organizations and practitioners will have rights to use and evaluate ABC codes in electronic commerce. Until the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) authorized commercial use and evaluation of ABC codes in HIPAA transactions (under 45 CFR section 162.940), these entities could not easily study or offer new products and services that fell outside conventional physician-directed approaches to care. This left major gaps in the national health information infrastructure (NHII) and may have resulted in unnecessarily high morbidity and mortality rates and health insurance premiums.

Reflecting growing interest in consumer-driven health plans, a robust NHII, integrative healthcare and evidence-based medicine as potential solutions to the U.S. healthcare crisis, ABC codes are expected to generate immediate improvements in health insurance benefit plan design, managed care and provider contracting, utilization and clinical practice management, claims processing, outcomes research and actuarial analyses.



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The codes fit into the same insurance billing forms, data fields, software applications, information systems and business processes as CPT and HCPCS II codes. In combination, the three code sets help health-promoting organizations and professionals better manage care, claims and outcomes.

ABC codes reflect the practices of acupuncturists, bodyworkers, chiropractors, holistic physicians, homeopaths, ethnic and minority healthcare professionals, massage therapists, midwives, naturopaths, nurses, oriental medicine practitioners, osteopaths, somatic educators, spiritual healers and others. Forthcoming codes will reflect care delivered by nutritionists, holistic dentists, mental health professionals, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physical therapists and others.

Alternative Link (www.alternativelink.com), the original developer of ABC codes, delivers information products and consulting services that help health-promoting organizations and professionals finance, administer and deliver cost-effective care that improves individual and public health, business and industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development. (Contact Synthia Laura Molina, CEO, at 505.875.0001 x 203 Mountain Time or synthia.molina@alternativelink.com.)

The Foundation for Integrative Healthcare (www.fihc.org), an organization founded to oversee ABC terminology development, manages information on the characteristics and outcomes of care to help health-promoting organizations and practitioners make rational decisions that improve individual health, industry efficiencies and socioeconomic development. (Contact David Riley, Chair of the FIHC Scientific Advisory Board, at 505.983.0546 Mountain Time or david.riley@fihc.org.)

Information about ABC codes and their use under HIPAA can be obtained at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/hipaa/hipaa2/molina.pdf> and through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' Office of HIPAA Standards. (Contact Jared Adair, Director of the Office of HIPAA Standards, at 410.786.4160 Eastern Time or jadair@cms.hhs.gov.)

Transcripts and downloads from the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics' review of ABC codes are available at www.ncvhs.hhs.gov for the April 10th-11th, May 29th-30th, September 25th-26th and December 10th-11th hearings of 2002, as well as the January 29th-30th, March 25th-26th and May 20th-22nd hearings of 2003. (Contact Kepa Zubeldia, Acting Chair of the NCVHS Standards and Security Subcommittee, at 801.444.0339 Mountain Time or kepa.zubeldia@claredi.com.)

Information on the nature of the U.S. healthcare crisis and promising solutions is available through the Center for Practical Health Reform at <http://www.practicalhealthreform.org/writings.htm>. (Contact Brian Klepper, Founder of CPHR, at 904.246.9643 Eastern Time or bklepper@practicalhealthreform.org.)

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