

Best Practices in Using Medicare Advantage Encounter Data for Healthcare Research

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OVERVIEW

In 2018, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) first made encounter data submitted by Medicare Advantage (MA) plans available to researchers. Experts have raised concerns that these data may not be appropriate for measuring healthcare utilization or making comparisons between MA and traditional Medicare.

CMS has collected encounter data since 2012. Unlike claims submitted by providers for reimbursement, encounter data are not solely used for payment. Beginning in 2016, select encounter data are used to risk adjust plans' payments for the health of their enrollees. Yet, concerns that the data are incomplete and sufficiently different from claims warrant caution in analysis and making comparisons to traditional Medicare.

This study, conducted by BRG with support from the Anthem Public Policy Institute, adds to our understanding of MA encounter data. BRG examined the importance of preparing the data for analysis and compared the data to benchmarks of service utilization to assess its completeness.

Topics

- Background on MA encounter data
- Methodology
- Results of data submission quality
- Comparison of measures of utilization
- Discussion of findings

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