

December 23, 2022

The Honorable Douglas A. Ducey
Governor of Arizona
1700 W Washington
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

The Honorable Karen Fann
President of the Arizona State Senate
1700 W Washington
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

The Honorable Russell Bowers
Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives
1700 W. Washington
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Governor Ducey, President Fann, and Speaker Bowers:

In accordance with A.R.S. § 36-2903.12, please find the enclosed report on hospital charge master transparency. Please contact Maureen Sharp, Assistant Director, at (602) 417-4820 or maureen.sharp@azahcccs.gov if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Jami Snyder
Director

cc: The Honorable Katie Hobbs, Arizona Secretary of State



HOSPITAL CHARGEMASTER TRANSPARENCY

**REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR,
PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE AND
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

January 2023

Hospital Chargemaster Transparency Report

AHCCCS AND ADHS CHARGEMASTER/TRANSPARENCY REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is submitted jointly by the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) and Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). It describes the State's mandated process for hospitals to report their respective Chargemasters, how billed hospital charges compare to hospital costs, the processes for reporting hospital prices in other states, recent progress, and recommendations on the state's use of this information. To place these issues in context, AHCCCS and ADHS have conceptualized this report through a broader lens of transparency in health care of which hospital charges and/or price is a critical element.

In recent years, despite a number of new federal rules, hospitals and states continue to make slow and varied progress on price transparency. Among hospitals, depending on the methodology used, recent reports cite figures between 16% and 55% of hospitals nationwide in full compliance with the federal transparency requirements. Even for hospitals in compliance, variation in hospital reporting formats can make price comparisons difficult for consumers. Among states, sixteen¹ now have robust consumer-facing price comparison websites along with the data required to drive these websites, which is up from seven as of five years ago.

Arizona law requires hospitals to publish their Chargemasters, but the information in the Arizona Chargemaster may not be meaningful to persons covered by an insurance plan, paying through private payment or paying through a mechanism such as a Health Savings Account. Virtually all insurance carriers negotiate the prices they pay hospitals and other providers. Because many Chargemaster prices are not directly related to the hospitals' costs, Medicare rates are often the basis for the negotiated prices which health plans pay. Furthermore, because these contractual arrangements are confidential, the patient can draw little useful information from the Chargemaster, even if the negotiated pricing is a percent discount of charges.

In order for health care purchasers to assess value, they need information on both price and quality, and this information must be presented in a clear and accessible format. As noted in prior reports, hospital charges and the Chargemaster do not fully address this need.

¹ https://www.catalyze.org/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/2020/05/2020-Report-Card-on-State-Price-Transparency-Laws_May-2020_Published-uttkwt.pdf

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AHCCCS AND ADHS CHARGEMASTER/TRANSPARENCY REPORT

A. R. S. § 36-2903.12 requires the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) and the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) to report on hospital chargemaster transparency. Specifically:

On or before January 2, 2020, and each year thereafter, the director of the Arizona health care cost containment system administration and the director of the department of health services shall submit a joint report on hospital charge master transparency to the governor, the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate and shall provide a copy to the secretary of state. The report shall do all of the following:

- 1) Summarize the current charge master reporting process and hospital billed charges compared to costs,*
- 2) Provide examples of how charge masters or hospital prices are reported and used in other states, and*
- 3) Include recommendations to improve the state's use of hospital charge master information, including reporting and oversight changes.*

BACKGROUND

When consumers make any type of purchase decision among competing products and services, they typically know, or can learn, the price. Often, they are able to make a reasonable assessment of the quality of the item. However, health care purchasers in Arizona, especially individual patients, purchase services with little or no knowledge of what they will pay for the service or related alternative services and have limited ability to compare health care providers based on quality measures. This lack of price transparency is becoming increasingly more important for consumers as health care costs continue to rise and consumers pay more directly for their care through mechanisms such as Health Savings Accounts.

Our prior reports provided considerable detail on price transparency. Since then, our overall observations remain unchanged:

- In order for health care consumers to be able to assess value as they do for other goods and services, reliable and understandable price and quality information must be accessible and must be comparable across providers to allow a consumer to use it for decision-making.
- Because of significant changes in the health care market, the current Arizona Chargemaster reporting requirements provide little public service and do not deliver accurate pricing comparison and transparency as originally intended.

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- All Payer Claims Databases (APCD) can provide a mechanism for significant price transparency by providing credible cost and quality information for most payers, as seen in Washington, Colorado, and other states that have already implemented APCDs with consumer-friendly front-end websites. In order to ensure the uniformity, consistency, and transparency of reported data in an APCD, state agencies would have to serve an important clearinghouse role. However, establishing an APCD for Arizona would require legislative action and significant financial support for the additional agency administrative burden.
- Outpatient services comprise a large and growing portion of the services provided by hospitals, and should be included in a meaningful reporting structure. However, this would require action by the legislature to enact new reporting requirements.

FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

When considering Arizona's Chargemaster reporting requirement it may be informative to consider the recent hospital price transparency actions of the federal government. In 2019, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service (CMS) finalized the Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS) final rule (CMS-1717-F2). This rule requires each hospital operating within the United States to establish and make public a yearly list of the hospital's standard charges for items and services they provided, starting January 1, 2021. It also requires making public discounted cash prices, payer-specific negotiated charges, and de-identified minimum and maximum negotiated charges for at least 300 'shoppable' services that are packaged in a consumer-friendly manner².

In addition, the 2020 Transparency in Coverage final rule focused on price transparency at the health plan and health insurance issuers level for participants, beneficiaries and enrollees. As part of this rule, certain health plans and insurance issuers will be required to make available personalized out-of-pocket cost information and the underlying negotiated rates for all covered health care items and services through an internet-based self-service tool. This information is required to be available by January 1, 2023 for an initial set of 500 services, including items such as major vaccinations and outpatient visits, and January 1, 2024 for the remaining services. In addition, health plans and health insurance issuers will need to produce files with detailed pricing information such as negotiated rates for all covered items and services between the plan or issuer and in-network providers.³

The calendar year (CY) 2022 OPPS and ASC Payment System Final Rule, published in November 2021, gives further guidance on file availability, requiring that a machine-readable file posted on a hospital website for public consumption be accessible to both automated searches and direct downloads starting January 1, 2022. It also implements an increase in monetary penalties for hospitals in noncompliance with the Hospital Price Transparency Final Rule. Prior to this rule, the monetary penalties consisted of a maximum \$300 daily fine, regardless of hospital size. The CY 2022 Final Rule amends the fines to a maximum of \$300 per day for hospitals with 30 or fewer

² <https://www.cms.gov/hospital-price-transparency/hospitals>

³ <https://www.cms.gov/CCIIO/Resources/Regulations-and-Guidance/Downloads/CMS-Transparency-in-Coverage-9915F.pdf>

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beds, with an additional penalty of \$10 per bed per day for hospitals with a bed count greater than 30, for a maximum daily fine of \$5,500. This increases the maximum yearly fine to \$2,007,500, a sharp increase from the original \$109,500 yearly maximum.⁴ This rule went into effect January 1, 2022.

So far, there has been a wide variety of compliance with the federal requirements among hospitals. A recent study indicated 76% of hospitals nationwide have at least posted a machine-readable file. The report gave 55% of hospitals a perfect score for hospital transparency, indicating these hospitals have complete machine-readable files with cash, list, and negotiated rates for most services.⁵ While noncompliance has been an issue since the rule was implemented in January 1, 2021, CMS issued its first fines to two Georgia hospitals in June of 2022 for failure to comply with requirements.⁶

Using a somewhat different methodology and sampling 2,000 hospitals across the country, a report by Patients Rights Advocate found only 16% of sampled hospitals met the full price transparency requirements.⁷ The study reviewed over 2,000 provider websites across all 50 states and deemed hospitals non-compliant if they had not published five standard charges, negotiated rates, and a display of shoppable services, all in both a machine-readable file and consumer friendly file. Patient Rights Advocate notes that larger providers were most likely to have complied, but they also point out that of the three largest hospital systems in the country, two currently are in total noncompliance.

CURRENT CHARGEMASTER REPORTING PROCESS AND HOSPITAL CHARGES COMPARED TO COST

Chargemaster Reporting

Pursuant to A.R.S. §36-436 and A.A.C. R9-11-302, Arizona hospitals report their entire Chargemaster and accompanying overview form to ADHS. ADHS is authorized by statute and rule to review these documents, but not to dispute or direct the amounts or methods of charging.

Although hospitals base their charges for the uninsured on information contained in their Chargemaster, the Chargemaster content is of no utility to health care consumers regardless of their health insurance status. The Chargemaster contains charges at the individual detail level (e.g., per dose, per hour, per day, per item). Since every health care encounter includes many separate service components such as physician care, nursing, bed charges, service charges (e.g., venipuncture, radiology, lab), procedures (anesthesiologist, operating room, recovery room), and supply charges (e.g., stents, drugs, IV line), it is impossible for any consumer, whether insured or not, to estimate their cost for any hospital visit from the content of the Chargemaster. Virtually all insurance carriers negotiate the prices they pay hospitals and other providers. Since health plan

⁴ <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/cy-2022-medicare-hospital-outpatient-prospective-payment-system-and-ambulatory-surgical-center-0>

⁵ <https://revcycleintelligence.com/news/more-hospitals-complying-with-price-transparency-rule-requirements>

⁶ <https://revcycleintelligence.com/news/georgia-hospitals-fined-for-hospital-price-transparency-violations>

⁷ <https://www.patientrightsadvocate.org/august-semi-annual-compliance-report-2022>

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contractual arrangements are confidential, these pricing structures are not publicly released. While many hospitals will provide an estimated out-of-pocket cost to patients upon request, for the most accurate estimate, insured patients must contact their health plan directly.

As noted above, where pricing information is made available, it must be presented in a clear and accessible format, and must be comparable across providers to allow a consumer to use it for decision-making. The current Chargemaster reporting requirements do not meet this criteria, because Chargemasters are lists of thousands of individual charges with no relationship to specific procedures or diagnoses, and with no uniformity of format, description or categorization between hospitals.

The current Chargemaster reporting requirements were implemented decades ago. The significant changes in health care reimbursement that have occurred over the ensuing years have rendered the current Chargemaster reporting obsolete and of minimal value to health care consumers. ADHS does not use the collected Chargemasters for any purpose. Neither AHCCCS nor ADHS are aware of any state or other government agency that uses the Chargemaster data for any purpose.

See the appendices for more Chargemaster information.

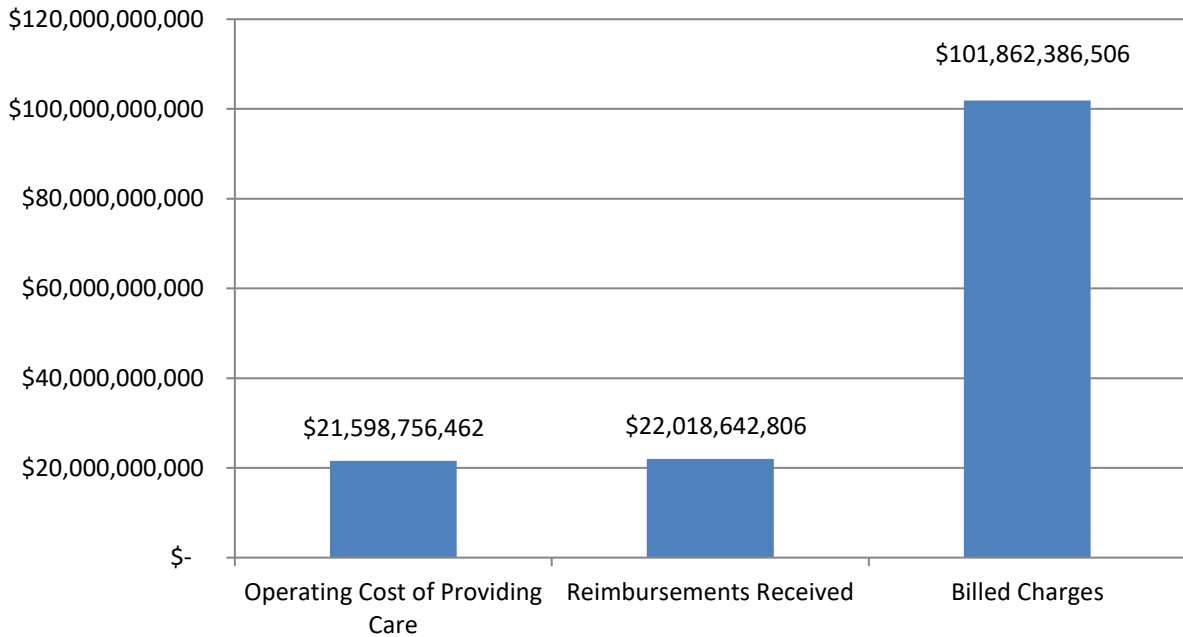
Other Hospital Reporting

Pursuant to A.R.S. §36-125.04, hospitals also report certain financial information to ADHS, including Audited Financial Statements and the state Uniform Accounting Report (UAR). AHCCCS uses the UAR data, as well as other publicly available information, to provide a report to the Legislature and Governor's office pursuant A.R.S. §36-2903.08.

Figure 1 compares the billed charges, reimbursements, and operating costs for fiscal year 2021 for all ADHS licensed hospitals to illustrate the differences in charges, operating costs, and reimbursements based on the aggregate information from data submitted by hospitals on the UAR. This chart shows that, in aggregate, hospital reimbursements are approximately 22% of billed charges, reflecting the large disparity between billed services and the amount ultimately received in payment for those services.

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Figure 1: Comparison of Hospital Charges and Costs for all Arizona Licensed Hospitals for FY 2021



Laws 2013, Chapter 202 established additional price reporting requirements for Arizona health care providers⁸. Chapter 202 requires providers to make available on request or online the direct pay prices for at least the 25 most commonly provided services. Health care facilities with more than 50 inpatient beds must make available online or by request the 50 most commonly used Diagnosis Related Group (DRG) and outpatient codes (for facilities with fifty or fewer beds, the mandate declines to the top 35 most used DRG and 35 most used outpatient codes). However, this information is reported independently by each hospital, is not centrally reported or aggregated, and opportunities to compare prices are limited as the most common procedures can vary significantly between hospitals.

HOSPITAL REPORTING IN COMPARATIVE STATES

Across the states, progress has also been varied. In the most recent Semi-Annual Hospital Price Transparency Report from Patient Rights Advocate, which was issued in 2022, Arizona ranked as the state with the highest percentage of hospitals in compliance with federal price transparency law at 34%.⁹ Over a dozen states had less than 10% of hospitals in compliance, with four states having zero hospital compliance. Some states have also started implementing their own legislation to promote hospital transparency. Colorado passed the “Prohibit Collection Hospital Not Disclosing Prices” legislation in June of 2022. This legislation prohibits hospitals from pursuing

⁸ <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/21020>

⁹ <https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/finance/states-ranked-by-percentage-of-hospitals-compiling-with-price-transparency-law.html>

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debt collection from patients if the hospital is not in compliance with the CMS price transparency requirements.¹⁰

All Payer Claims Databases can provide a mechanism for significant price transparency for consumers by providing credible cost and quality information for most payers. Washington¹¹, Colorado¹², and seven other states have already implemented robust consumer-facing websites that allow consumers to compare shoppable services using data from their APCDs, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL).¹³ They note that implementing and maintaining an APCD involves cooperation among many stakeholders, including payers, providers and consumers of health care. To ensure the uniformity, consistency, and transparency of reported data in an APCD, state agencies would also likely have to serve an important clearinghouse role. However, establishing an APCD for Arizona would require legislative action and significant financial support for the additional agency administrative burden.

Recently more states are emphasizing quality transparency in addition to price transparency. Besides providing a more robust means to evaluate value, this addresses a general misconception that higher health care prices indicate better quality. States that provide robust price transparency do not necessarily provide robust quality information, and vice versa.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE STATE'S USE OF HOSPITAL CHARGE MASTER INFORMATION

AHCCCS and ADHS Observations

AHCCCS and ADHS will employ the following strategies to continue focusing on changes in price and quality transparency:

- 1) As the single largest payer in the State of Arizona, AHCCCS will continue to be transparent in sharing information on hospital billed charges and the payment amounts made by AHCCCS.
- 2) AHCCCS, with the support of ADHS, will continue to make publicly available financial information on hospital and other provider types more accessible through the AHCCCS website.
- 3) Through AHCCCS payment modernization initiatives, AHCCCS will continue to drive improved quality with a goal to decrease costs (e.g., through reduced readmissions, emergency department visits, etc.).
- 4) ADHS will continue to annually update and post hospital quality information via *AZ Care Check*, a searchable database containing information about deficiencies found against facilities/providers by the Arizona Department of Health Services. The link to that site is www.azdhs.gov/licensing/index.php#azcarecheck.

¹⁰ <https://www.policymed.com/2022/10/colorado-gives-teeth-to-federal-transparency-enforcement-efforts.html>

¹¹ <https://www.wahealthcarecompare.com/>

¹² <https://www.civhc.org/shop-for-care/>

¹³ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/transparency-and-disclosure-health-costs.aspx>

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- 5) AHCCCS and ADHS will continue to review their various transparency initiatives to consolidate or aggregate current reported data and streamline its display to avoid consumer confusion over multiple sets of similar data.

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Appendix A

Example of a Hospital Chargemaster Submission Page

| DEPT | Proc Number | Charge Description | Current Price |
|------|-------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 004 | 13144 | R+B INTERMEDIATE ICU | 2,280.00 |
| 004 | 33142 | R+B INTENSIVE CARE | 3,768.00 |
| 004 | 93146 | R+B MEDICAL SURGICAL | 1,272.00 |
| 004 | 7133903 | EXTENDED RECOVERY INTRM PER HR | 95.00 |
| 004 | 7621352 | DIRECT REFER HOSP OBSERV | 119.00 |
| 004 | 8011249 | CRRT/SLED | 1,500.00 |
| 005 | 3111 | R+B OBSTETRICS | 1,272.00 |
| 005 | 3129 | R+B OBSTETRICS | 1,272.00 |
| 005 | 13110 | R+B INTERMEDIATE ICU | 2,280.00 |
| 005 | 13128 | R+B INTERMEDIATE ICU | 2,280.00 |
| 005 | 13151 | R+B INTERMEDIATE ICU | 2,280.00 |
| 005 | 13169 | R+B INTERMEDIATE ICU | 2,280.00 |
| 005 | 13185 | R+B INTERMEDIATE ICU | 2,280.00 |
| 005 | 33118 | R+B INTENSIVE CARE | 3,768.00 |
| 005 | 33126 | R+B INTENSIVE CARE | 3,768.00 |
| 005 | 33159 | R+B INTENSIVE CARE | 3,768.00 |
| 005 | 33167 | R+B INTENSIVE CARE | 3,768.00 |
| 005 | 33183 | R+B INTENSIVE CARE | 3,768.00 |
| 005 | 93112 | R+B MEDICAL SURGICAL | 1,272.00 |
| 005 | 93120 | R+B MEDICAL SURGICAL | 1,272.00 |
| 005 | 93153 | R+B MEDICAL SURGICAL | 1,272.00 |
| 005 | 93161 | R+B MEDICAL SURGICAL | 1,272.00 |
| 005 | 93187 | R+B MEDICAL SURGICAL | 1,272.00 |
| 005 | 7104466 | EXTENDED RECOVERY PER HR | 53.00 |
| 005 | 7621816 | OBSERV/HR MED/SURG | 53.00 |
| 005 | 7621824 | OBSERV/HR MED/SURG | 53.00 |
| 005 | 7621832 | OBSERV/HR MED/SURG | 53.00 |
| 005 | 7621840 | OBSERV/HR MED/SURG | 53.00 |
| 005 | 7621857 | OBSERV/HR MED/SURG | 53.00 |
| 005 | 7622061 | DIRECT REFER HOSP OBSERV | 119.00 |
| 005 | 8011546 | CRRT/SLED | 1,500.00 |
| 021 | 11015 | R+B INTERMEDIATE ICU | 2,280.00 |
| 021 | 91017 | R+B MEDICAL SURGICAL | 1,272.00 |
| 021 | 7104441 | EXTENDED RECOVERY PER HR | 53.00 |
| 021 | 7104508 | EXTENDED RECOVERY INTRM PER HR | 95.00 |
| 021 | 7104524 | EXTENDED RECOVERY INTRM PER HR | 95.00 |
| 021 | 7620537 | OBSERV/HR MED/SURG | 53.00 |
| 021 | 7621360 | DIRECT REFER HOSP OBSERV | 119.00 |

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Appendix B

Chargemaster Overview Form

| | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Date Submitted to ADHS | | | | | | |
| Facility License Number | | | | | | |
| Facility Name | | | | | | |
| Facility Street Address | | | | | | |
| City | | | | | | |
| Zip | | | | | | |
| County | | | | | | |
| Type of Control (Drop Down Box) | | | | | | |
| Hospital Classification (Drop Down Box) | | | | | | |
| Licensed Capacity | | | | | | |
| Implementation Date of Rates and Charges | | | | | | |
| Percent Increase | | | | | | |
| Gross Patient Revenue - Existing: | | | | | | |
| Gross Patient Revenue - Proposed: | | | | | | |
| Previous Increase Date | | | | | | |
| Previous Increase Percent | | | | | | |
| Prepared By | | | | | | |
| Phone Number | | | | | | |
| E-mail Address | | | | | | |
| | Hospital Charge Code | Proposed Rate | Existing Rate | Increase Amount | Percent Increased | Comments |
| Daily Charge for: | | | | | | |
| Private Room | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Semi-Private Room | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Pediatric Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Nursery Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Pediatric Intensive Care Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Neonatal Intensive Care Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Cardiovascular Intensive Care Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Swing Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Rehabilitation Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Skilled Nursing Bed | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Minimum Charge for: | | | | | | |
| Labor and Delivery | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Trauma Team Activaton | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| EEG | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| EKG | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Complete Blood County with Differential | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Blood Bank Crossmatch | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Lithotripsy | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| X-ray | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| IVP | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Respiratory Therapy session with a Small Volume Nebulizer | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| CT scan of a head without contrast medium | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| CT scan of an abdomen with contrast medium | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Abdomen Ultrasound | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Brain MRI without contrast medium | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| 15 minutes of Physical Therapy | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Daily rate for Behavioral Health Serivces for: | | | | | | |
| Adult Patient | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Adolescent Patient | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |
| Pediatric Patient | | | | \$ - | #DIV/0! | |

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Appendix C Definitions

- **Charge Description Master (CDM):** The ‘charge master’, ‘hospital chargemaster’, or the ‘charge description master’ (CDM) is primarily a list of services/procedures, room accommodations, supplies, drugs/biologics, and/or radiopharmaceuticals that may be billed to a patient registered as an inpatient or outpatient on a claim.
- **Charge-to-cost ratios:** According to Anderson, “the ratio of charges to costs measures the relationship between actual hospital charges for services (what self-pay patients are generally asked to pay) and Medicare-allowable costs (what the CMS has determined to be the costs associated with care for all patients, not just Medicare patients).”¹⁴
- **Diagnoses Related Groups (DRG):** Codes assigned to hospital inpatient claims for reimbursement purposes. Although created and required by CMS for Medicare billing, most other payers also utilize DRG for determining reimbursement on inpatient hospital claims. The current MS-DRG (“medical severity”) code sets are severity adjusted, so claims for care of patients with complications or comorbidities receive a higher level of reimbursement. Special software called a "grouper" program uses ICD diagnosis and procedures codes, sex, discharge status, and the presence of complications or comorbidities to group clinically similar patients expected to use the same amount of hospital resources, and assigns an appropriate DRG code to the claims. The DRG code determines the amount of reimbursement the hospital will receive for that patient stay. MS-DRG is currently the national standard for Medicare hospital inpatient billing. AHCCCS utilizes the APR-DRG version.
- **All Patient Refined Diagnostic Related Groups (APR-DRG):** A classification system that classifies patients according to their reason of admission, severity of illness and risk of mortality. It is the inpatient rate methodology utilized by AHCCCS. The APR-DRGs expand the basic DRG structure by adding four subclasses to each DRG. The addition of the four subclasses addresses patient differences relating to severity of illness and risk of mortality. The four severity of illness subclasses and the four risk of mortality subclasses are numbered sequentially from 1 to 4 indicating respectively, minor, moderate, major, or extreme severity of illness or risk of mortality.
- **Hospital Charges:** The amount the hospital billed for the entire hospital stay; not the charges for any specific procedure or condition. Total charges do not reflect the actual cost of providing care nor the payment received by the hospital for services provided.

¹⁴ Anderson GF. From ‘Soak The Rich’ To ‘Soak The Poor’: Recent Trends In Hospital Pricing. *Health Aff.* May-June, 2007; 26(3):780-789.