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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

[CMS-3303-PN]

Medicare and Medicaid Programs; Application from the Accreditation Commission for Health Care, Inc., for Continued Approval of its Home Health Agency Accreditation Program

AGENCY: Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, HHS.

ACTION: Proposed notice.

SUMMARY: This proposed notice acknowledges the receipt of an application from the Accreditation Commission for Health Care Inc., (ACHC) for continued recognition as a national accrediting organization for home health agencies (HHAs) that wish to participate in the Medicare or Medicaid programs. Section 1865(b)(3)(A) of the Social Security Act (the Act) requires that within 60 days of receipt of an organization's complete application, CMS publish a notice that identifies the national accrediting body making the request, describes the nature of the request, and provides at least a 30-day public comment period.

DATES: To be assured consideration, comments must be received at one of the addresses provided below, no later than 5 p.m. on **[OFR insert date 30 days after date of publication in the Federal Register]**.

ADDRESSES: In commenting, please refer to file code CMS-3303-PN. Because of staff and resource limitations, we cannot accept comments by facsimile (FAX) transmission.

You may submit comments in one of four ways (please choose only one of the ways listed):

1. Electronically. You may submit electronic comments on this regulation to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the "Submit a comment" instructions.

2. By regular mail. You may mail written comments to the following address ONLY:

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,
Department of Health and Human Services,
Attention: CMS-3303-PN,
P.O. Box 8016,
Baltimore, MD 21244-8010.

Please allow sufficient time for mailed comments to be received before the close of the comment period.

3. By express or overnight mail. You may send written comments to the following address ONLY:

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,
Department of Health and Human Services,
Attention: CMS-3303-PN,
Mail Stop C4-26-05,
7500 Security Boulevard,
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850.

4. By hand or courier. Alternatively, you may deliver (by hand or courier) your written ONLY to the following addresses:

a. For delivery in Washington, DC--

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,
Department of Health and Human Services,
Room 445-G, Hubert H. Humphrey Building,

200 Independence Avenue, SW.,
Washington, DC 20201

(Because access to the interior of the Hubert H. Humphrey Building is not readily available to persons without federal government identification, commenters are encouraged to leave their comments in the CMS drop slots located in the main lobby of the building. A stamp-in clock is available for persons wishing to retain a proof of filing by stamping in and retaining an extra copy of the comments being filed.)

b. For delivery in Baltimore, MD--
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services,
Department of Health and Human Services,
7500 Security Boulevard,
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850.

If you intend to deliver your comments to the Baltimore address, call telephone number (410) 786-7195.

Comments erroneously mailed to the addresses indicated as appropriate for hand or courier delivery may be delayed and received after the comment period.

For information on viewing public comments, see the beginning of the "SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION" section.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Cindy Melanson, (410) 786-0310, Monda Shaver, (410) 786-3410, or Patricia Chmielewski, (410) 786-6899.

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION:

Inspection of Public Comments: All comments received before the close of the comment period

are available for viewing by the public, including any personally identifiable or confidential business information that is included in a comment. We post all comments received before the close of the comment period on the following website as soon as possible after they have been received: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the search instructions on that website to view public comments.

Comments received timely will also be available for public inspection as they are received, generally beginning approximately 3 weeks after publication of a document, at the headquarters of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 7500 Security Boulevard, Baltimore, Maryland 21244, Monday through Friday of each week from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. To schedule an appointment to view public comments, phone 1-800-743-3951.

I. Background

Under the Medicare program, eligible beneficiaries may receive covered services from a home health agency (HHA) provided certain requirements are met. Sections 1861(o) and 1891 of the Social Security Act (the Act) establish distinct criteria for facilities seeking designation as an HHA. Regulations concerning provider agreements are at 42 CFR part 489 and those pertaining to activities relating to the survey and certification of facilities are at 42 CFR part 488. The regulations at 42 CFR part 484 specify the minimum conditions that an HHA must meet to participate in the Medicare program.

Generally, to enter into an agreement, an HHA must first be certified by a state survey agency as complying with the conditions or requirements set forth in part 484 of our Medicare regulations. Thereafter, the HHA is subject to regular surveys by a state survey agency to determine whether it continues to meet these requirements. There is an alternative, however, to surveys by state agencies.

Section 1865(a)(1) of the Act provides that, if a provider entity demonstrates through accreditation by an approved national accrediting organization that all applicable Medicare conditions are met or exceeded, we will deem those provider entities as having met the requirements. Accreditation by an accrediting organization is voluntary and is not required for Medicare participation.

If an accrediting organization is recognized by the Secretary as having standards for accreditation that meet or exceed Medicare requirements, any provider entity accredited by the national accrediting body's approved program would be deemed to meet the Medicare conditions. A national accrediting organization applying for approval of its accreditation program under part 488, subpart A, must provide CMS with reasonable assurance that the accrediting organization requires the accredited provider entities to meet requirements that are at least as stringent as the Medicare conditions. Our regulations concerning the approval of accrediting organizations are set forth at §488.4 and §488.8(d)(3). The regulations at §488.8(d)(3) require accrediting organizations to reapply for continued approval of its accreditation program every 6 years or sooner as determined by us.

ACHC's current term of approval for their HHA accreditation program expires February 24, 2015.

II. Approval of Deeming Organizations

Section 1865(a)(2) of the Act and our regulations at §488.8(a) require that our findings concerning review and approval of a national accrediting organization's requirements consider, among other factors, the applying accrediting organization's requirements for accreditation; survey procedures; resources for conducting required surveys; capacity to furnish information for use in enforcement activities; monitoring procedures for provider entities found not in

compliance with the conditions or requirements; and ability to provide CMS with the necessary data for validation.

Section 1865(a)(3)(A) of the Act further requires that we publish, within 60 days of receipt of an organization's complete application, a notice identifying the national accrediting body making the request, describing the nature of the request, and providing at least a 30-day public comment period. We have 210 days from the receipt of a complete application to publish notice of approval or denial of the application.

The purpose of this proposed notice is to inform the public of ACHC's request for continued approval of its HHA accreditation program. This notice also solicits public comment on whether ACHC's requirements meet or exceed the Medicare conditions of participation (CoPs) for HHAs.

III. Evaluation of Deeming Authority Request

ACHC submitted all the necessary materials to enable us to make a determination concerning its request for continued approval of its HHA accreditation program. This application was determined to be complete on June 27, 2014. Under section 1865(a)(2) of the Act and our regulations at §488.8 (Federal review of accrediting organizations), our review and evaluation of ACHC will be conducted in accordance with, but not necessarily limited to, the following factors:

- The equivalency of ACHC's standards for HHAs as compared with Medicare's HHA CoPs.
- ACHC's survey process to determine the following:
 - ++ The composition of the survey team, surveyor qualifications, and the ability of the organization to provide continuing surveyor training.

++ The comparability of ACHC's processes to those of state agencies, including survey frequency, and the ability to investigate and respond appropriately to complaints against accredited facilities.

++ ACHC's processes and procedures for monitoring a HHA found out of compliance with ACHC's program requirements. These monitoring procedures are used only when ACHC identifies noncompliance. If noncompliance is identified through validation reviews or complaint surveys, the state survey agency monitors corrections as specified at §488.7(d).

++ ACHC's capacity to report deficiencies to the surveyed facilities and respond to the facility's plan of correction in a timely manner.

++ ACHC's capacity to provide CMS with electronic data and reports necessary for effective validation and assessment of the organization's survey process.

++ The adequacy of ACHC's staff and other resources, and its financial viability.

++ ACHC's capacity to adequately fund required surveys.

++ ACHC's policies with respect to whether surveys are announced or unannounced, to assure that surveys are unannounced.

++ ACHC's agreement to provide CMS with a copy of the most current accreditation survey together with any other information related to the survey as CMS may require (including corrective action plans).

IV. Collection of Information Requirements

This document does not impose information collection requirements, that is, reporting, recordkeeping or third-party disclosure requirements. Consequently, there is no need for review by the Office of Management and Budget under the authority of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

V. Response to Public Comments

Because of the large number of public comments we normally receive on **Federal Register** documents, we are not able to acknowledge or respond to them individually. We will consider all comments we receive by the date and time specified in the “**DATES**” section of this preamble, and, when we proceed with a subsequent document, we will respond to the comments in the preamble to that document.

CMS-3303-PN

Dated: August 12, 2014.

Marilyn Tavenner,

Administrator,

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

BILLING CODE: 4120-01-P

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