

# Medicare National Coverage Determination

## Topic

Medicare Coverage of Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse

## Decision

Medicare will cover the following for Medicare beneficiaries, including pregnant women:

1. Annual alcohol screening;
2. For those who screen positive, up to four brief, face-to-face, behavioral counseling visits per year.

## What this means:

1. Screening tests for alcohol use are designed to identify individuals experiencing an alcohol use problem. **Medicare will cover one alcohol screening test annually.** There are a number of acceptable screening tests available to clinicians. Clinicians can choose screening strategies that are appropriate for their clinical population and setting.
2. **Medicare will cover up to four face-to-face behavioral counseling visits per year for members:**
  - Who misuse alcohol, but whose levels or patterns of alcohol consumption do not meet criteria for alcohol dependence (defined as at least three of the following: tolerance; withdrawal symptoms; impaired control; preoccupation with acquisition and/or use; persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to quit; sustains social, occupational, or recreational disability; use continues despite adverse consequences);
  - Who are competent and alert at the time that counseling is provided;
  - Whose counseling is furnished by qualified primary care physicians or other primary care practitioners in a primary care setting.

A primary care setting is defined as one in which there is provision of integrated, accessible health care services by clinicians who are accountable for addressing a large majority of personal health care needs, developing a sustained partnership with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community. Emergency departments, inpatient hospital settings, ambulatory surgical centers, independent diagnostic testing facilities, skilled nursing facilities, inpatient rehabilitation facilities and hospices are **not** considered primary care settings under this definition.

**Effective date:** October 14, 2011

**This announcement can be found at:**

<https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/details/nca-decision-memo.aspx?NCAId=249>