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## **Medicare Information to Become Accessible to Blind Beneficiaries**

*Blind Americans Reach Agreement with CMS on Accessibility of Medicare Information*

**Baltimore, Maryland (April 25, 2018):** The National Federation of the Blind and three blind individuals have reached a settlement agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). The settlement resolves the allegation brought forth in a 2016 lawsuit that CMS discriminated against blind and low-vision beneficiaries by failing to provide meaningful and equal access to Medicare information.

The agreement requires that CMS set up processes so that beneficiaries can make a single request to receive all communications and notices from Medicare in an accessible format, such as large print, Braille, audio, or electronic data. Additional terms include that CMS will:

- Provide accessible, fillable forms for beneficiaries on Medicare.gov.
- Issue accessibility best practices to Medicare Health and Drug Plans.
- Implement a policy that extends the time in which a beneficiary must answer time-sensitive communications by the number of days it takes CMS to process the beneficiary's accessible format request.
- Develop a plan to promote the availability of accessible materials to Medicare beneficiaries.

CMS has already begun implementing critical procedural changes that include training employees on compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation act of 1973, implementing testing requirements to ensure that information posted on Medicare.gov is accessible, providing CMS's most popular publications in accessible e-book formats at Medicare.gov, and establishing a Customer Accessibility Resource Staff to coordinate and support CMS's accessible Medicare communications. The agreement prohibits CMS from changing any of these new practices in ways that would result in less effective access to Medicare information for blind individuals.

"Thousands of blind and low-vision people depend on Medicare benefits and must be able to apply for, understand, and manage those benefits independently," said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. "This agreement will ensure that blind Medicare beneficiaries have equal access to critical and often time-sensitive information about their individual benefits and this vital program."

"The Medicare benefits a person receives are only as good as the access they have to them," said Silvia Yee, senior staff attorney for the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund. "Without equal access to vital Medicare information, blind people not only face greater difficulty getting their health care needs met, they also run a higher risk of losing services and supports altogether when they can't properly access details about Medicare plan benefits, review services provided, or

confirm how much those services will cost. DREDF applauds this necessary step forward by CMS in providing Americans who are blind --including thousands of aging low-vision Medicare beneficiaries--access to necessary information that non-disabled people get to take for granted.”

The plaintiffs were represented by Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF), and Sugarman, Rogers, Barshak & Cohen, P.C.

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### **About the National Federation of the Blind**

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), headquartered in Baltimore, is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in the fifty states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. The NFB defends the rights of blind people of all ages and provides information and support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. We believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality. Learn more about our many programs and initiatives at [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org).

**About Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF):** Founded in 1979, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund is a leading national civil rights law and policy center directed by individuals with disabilities and parents who have children with disabilities. DREDF works to advance the civil and human rights of people with disabilities through legal advocacy, training, education, and public policy and legislative development. Learn more about DREDF's work at: [dredf.org](http://dredf.org)

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