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NY05-02
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MEMORANDUM

To: Health Benefits Administrators of New York State Agencies; Participating Employers and Participating Agencies
From: Employee Benefits Division
Subject: New Empire Plan Identification Cards/New Identification Number
Date: January 26, 2005

Empire Plan enrollees will receive new identification cards during the Spring of 2005. These new cards will replace the current New York State Government Employee Benefit Cards.

To better protect the confidentiality of personal benefits information, the new identification cards will include an alternate identification number instead of the enrollee's social security number. This alternate number currently appears on NYBEAS and on the Empire Plan carrier files. By using this new identification card when receiving covered services, enrollees will be able to avoid sharing their social security numbers with providers. Once the new identification cards have been issued to enrollees, all correspondence from Empire Plan carriers, including Explanation of Benefits, will use the alternate number. The Employee Benefits Division (EBD) and the Empire Plan carriers will maintain both the enrollee's social security number and alternate number on the enrollment file. Having both numbers on file will assist EBD and the carriers with servicing enrollees who may not have their alternate number available when they are inquiring about enrollment, claims or benefit issues.

For groups which have the benefit modifications that took effect on January 1, 2005, the card features a new design and includes information to assist providers with benefits and claims. A Copay Code is shown on the front of the card which will enable Empire Plan providers to determine the appropriate copayment due at time of service. The Empire Plan toll free telephone number is displayed prominently on the back of the card. Since we are issuing new identification numbers for all Empire Plan enrollees, employees in bargaining units without settled contracts (executive branch groups represented by PIA, PBA, NYSCOPBA, Council 82, ALSEU and Negotiating Unit SY in the Judicial Branch) will receive new cards in the current "New York Government Employee" design.

In anticipation of the distribution of new cards, we ask that you process any outstanding transactions that would impact information on the identification card, for example, correcting name spelling, adding newly eligible dependents, or deleting dependents no longer eligible for coverage. **Empire Plan identification cards with incorrect addresses will be returned to agencies.** Therefore, we ask that you make updating of all enrollees' addresses current on the NYBEAS system a priority. In addition, please advise your enrollees that new Empire Plan cards will be issued shortly and encourage them to update any information that has changed since the last NYSHIP Benefits Statement.

The Employee Benefits Division will be sending a letter to Empire Plan enrollees prior to the card reissue to alert enrollees that new cards are coming and explain the alternate identification number.

Additional information about the card, the card carrier, and card production/mailing schedule will be provided in an HBA memo as we near the mailing dates. If you have any questions, please call your processor.