

Clearing up the Confusion of Social Security Numbers: Verifying Eligibility

Recently, there has been confusion about being able to obtain a TRICARE beneficiary's full Social Security Number (SSN) from the beneficiary's identification (ID) cards. Compounding this problem is the beneficiary's reluctance to provide his/her SSN during provider visits.

Some of this confusion can be linked to the recently launched Department of Defense (DoD) SSN Reduction Plan to help prevent identity theft of DoD ID cardholders. The DoD is removing SSNs from DoD ID cards in the following three phases:

- Phase One (in progress): Remove dependent SSNs; sponsor SSNs remain visible
- Phase Two (beginning by the end of calendar year 2009): Remove printed SSNs from all ID cards; Geneva Convention ID cards retain the last four digits of the SSN
- Phase Three (beginning during calendar year 2012): Remove SSNs embedded in ID barcodes

Remember that per DoD instruction and reinforced in the [TRICARE Provider Handbook](#), it is both allowable and advisable for you to copy a beneficiary's ID card to facilitate eligibility verification and for the purpose of rendering needed services. The DoD recommends that you copy both sides of the ID card and retain copies for future reference.

Although SSNs are being removed from DoD ID cards, you should continue to use the sponsor's SSN (or former unremarried spouse's SSN when applicable) for TRICARE claims submission and eligibility verification. To verify eligibility, you must search by sponsor SSN; however having the sponsor's SSN is not necessary to submit claims or referral/authorizations online.

For more information on the SSN Reduction Plan, visit www.cac.mil.