

The Benefits of Precise Coding for Patients, Care Teams and Practices

It may not be the most thrilling component of the office visit, but capturing accurate and precise diagnosis codes can lead to better patient care, improved quality outcomes and more resources for practices that participate in the MaineHealth ACO. That's because the engine that drives value-based care, the quality- and cost-based reimbursement model used for ACO contracts, is accurate assessment of patients' disease acuity.

Here's a breakdown of benefits:

1. **For patients.** Increasingly, the level of benefit a patient can receive from an insurer, particularly a Medicare Advantage plan, is determined by their disease complexity. For example, a patient who has diabetes with neuropathy may be eligible for diabetic shoes without a pre-authorization. As long as the neuropathy is coded, of course. This is true for preventive services as well. A precise diagnosis can trigger enhanced care management based on complexity while a more vague diagnosis will cause the patient to miss out.
2. **For care teams.** Pre-visit planning is easier with more accurate coding from the provider. For example, if an MA sees that a patient has severe depression instead of just dysthymia, they'll know to complete a full PHQ-9 instead of a PHQ-2. Or if a consulting physician sees that a patient has stage III or IV CKD instead of general "CKD" it can guide decisions around medications and other treatments.
3. **For practices.** More precise coding can lead to increased resources for practices. Value-based contracts set targets for the cost of care; when providers represent patient complexity precisely, the cost targets become more reasonable, and shared savings is more likely. The ACO distributes a large portion of shared savings to practices to support direct patient care and population health efforts.

We have a host of resources [on our website](#) to help care teams increase coding precision. They include disease-specific "coding cards" with basic info and a set of "Basics and Beyond" documentation guides with more detail. Plus, videos and toolkits. [Check it out.](#)