

HHS Style Guide for Consumer Materials, version 1.3

This is a guide. The style and examples reflected in this guide will not work in all instances.

This guide is designed to help bring consistency to materials written for people who get Texas Medicaid or other state benefits. It should be used along with the documents, "HHS Preferred Terms and Phrases for Consumer Materials" (English and Spanish) and "HHS Basic Writing Tips for Consumer Materials."

The most recent updates to this guide are highlighted in yellow. If you have questions, comments or would like to suggest an addition to this list, please e-mail hhs.communications@hsc.state.tx.us with the subject line, "HHS Style Guide."

The following includes exceptions to *The Gregg Reference Manual*, Tenth Edition, and the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition.

This is an evolving document. It will be periodically updated.

Subject	Approved Usage
2-1-1	<p>Always write 2-1-1 with dashes between the numerals and never as 211. Do not refer to this number as "Information and Referral."</p> <p>Correct: To learn more about state benefits, call 2-1-1.</p> <p>Not correct: To learn more about state benefits, call the Information and Referral line at 2-1-1.</p> <p>Header example:</p> <p>Correct: Finding Help in Texas: 2-1-1</p> <p>Not correct: Information and Referral: 2-1-1</p> <p>Depending on the context, it might be helpful to explain what option the person should select. For example:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Call 2-1-1 to report any changes to your case within 10 days. When you dial 2-1-1, pick a language and then press 2.</p> <p>Other uses of 2-1-1:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">If you can't connect to 2-1-1, call 1-877-541-7905. You also can visit the 2-1-1 Texas website at www.211texas.org.</p>
Abbreviations Acronyms Initialisms	<p>Write the following as shown below on first reference. On second reference, use just the acronyms or abbreviations.</p> <p>Programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Care Case Management (PCCM). • Child Protective Services (CPS). • Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). • Community Living Assistance and Support Services (CLASS). • Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Subject	Approved Usage
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). • Medicaid for the Elderly and People with Disabilities (MEPD). • Qualified Medicare Beneficiaries (QMB). • Specified Low Income Medicare Beneficiaries (SLMB). • Qualifying Individuals-1 (QI-1). • Social Security number (SSN). • State Kids' Insurance Program (SKIP). <p>Agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of State Health Services (DSHS). • Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS). • Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). • Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). • Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC). • Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC). • Texas Youth Commission (TYC). • Texas Medicaid & Healthcare Partnership (TMHP). • Texas Employee Retirement System (ERS). • Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). • U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). • Social Security Administration (SSA). <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). • Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). • Individual Retirement Account (IRA). • Obstetrician/Gynecologist (OB/GYN). • Supplemental Security Income (SSI). • Texas Medicaid & Healthcare Partnership (TMHP). • Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA). • Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA). • Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). • Personal Identification Number (PIN). <p>These acronyms and abbreviations can be used as the first reference. There is no need to spell out the words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SNAP food benefits • STAR • STAR+PLUS • ID (as in identification card)

Subject	Approved Usage
	<p>The following terms should <i>always</i> be spelled out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Americans with Disabilities Act (not ADA). • Behavioral health (not BH). • Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (not BCCCP). • Central nervous system (not CNS). • Central Time (not CT)—Do not add “daylight,” “savings” or “standard.” • Claim type (not CT). • Community-based organization (not CBO). • Disability Determination Services (not DDS). • Family planning (not FP). • Federal Poverty Limits (not FPL or FPIL). • For example (not e.g.) • Home and Community Services (HCS). • In other words (not i.e.) • Long-term services and supports (not LTSS). • Medicaid Buy-In (not MBI). • Mental health (not MH). • Office of the Inspector General (not OIG). • Plan to Achieve Self-Support (not PASS). • Primary care provider (not PCP). • Prior authorization (not PA). • Proficiency test (not PT). • Remittance advice (not RA). • Remittance notice (not RN). • Texas Health Steps (not THSteps). • Women’s Health Program (not WHP). <p>The following terms have specific usage rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension—Abbreviate “extension” when it is used with a telephone number. For example, “Call 512-555-5555, Ext. 67000.” • Facsimile—Always use the shorter “fax.” It is capitalized when used as part of address information and lowercase when used within a sentence. • United States (U.S.)—Use the acronym “U.S.” instead of “United States” in front of federal agency and department names. For example, “The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will issue its ruling in May.” • Number—Do not use the abbreviation “No.”

Subject	Approved Usage
<p>Ages</p>	<p>“Age XX” or “XX years old”</p> <p>Do not mention the age that isn’t included in the group. For example:</p> <p>Not correct: Children under 16 years old can be in this program.</p> <p>Correct: Children age 15 and younger can be in this program.</p> <p>or</p> <p>Children 15 years old and younger can be in this program.</p> <p>Whenever possible, use years when describing age. Only use months when referring to children 18 months old and younger, and only when the age has to be expressed in partial years. For example:</p> <p>Correct: Children should get this vaccine between the ages of 18 months old and 2 years old.</p> <p>Not correct: Children should get this vaccine between the ages of 1 1/2 years old and 24 months old.</p> <p>The Not correct example above displays two mistakes: The phrase “1 1/2 years old” should be displayed as “18 months old.” The phrase “24 months old” should be displayed as “2 years old” since that age can be expressed in whole years without reference to partial years.</p> <p>Refer to the age of a newborn as “birth.” For example:</p> <p>Correct: This applies to babies birth through 3 months of age.</p> <p>Not correct: This applies to babies 0 through 3 months of age.</p> <p>(Also see “Numbers.”)</p>
<p>Ampersand (&)</p>	<p>Do not use unless it is part of an official name (e.g., <i>Texas Medicaid & Healthcare Partnership, Boys & Girls Clubs</i>). The word “and” should be used instead.</p> <p>Correct: Texas Health and Human Services Commission.</p> <p>Not correct: Texas Health & Human Services Commission</p>

Subject	Approved Usage
Bullets	<p>Use periods at the end of every bulleted item except if the listed items are like those on an inventory sheet or shopping list.</p> <p>Do not use semicolons or commas after bulleted items.</p> <p>Capitalize the first letter of the first word in each bullet.</p> <p>It is acceptable to begin a bullet with a numeral.</p> <p><i>Writing tips:</i></p> <p>Break up long lists into smaller groups using headings to identify the common theme. Try to keep the number of bulleted items in a list to 4 to 7 items.</p> <p>Be consistent when using bullets – either make them in list form (or phrases), or make all of the bullets complete sentences.</p>
Call Center/Contact Center Names	<p>When possible, avoid listing a call or contact center name. For example:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Not correct: Call the PCCM Client Help Line at 1-888-302-6688.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Correct: To learn more about Medicaid services, call 1-888-302-6688.</p>
Commas	<p>Specifically, serial commas. Generally, in sentences that list items you should use a comma before the final conjunction or item in the list.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Both CHIP and Children’s Medicaid cover doctor visits, eye exams, glasses, dental services, and prescriptions.</p>
Counties	<p>The word “county” is capitalized when it appears as part of a proper name, but not in the case of plurals.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Bexar County</p> <p>Bexar and Travis counties</p>
Dates	<p>Date ranges must be specific.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Within 10 days of when you first noticed the symptoms.</p> <p>Return the documents within 10 business days (not including Saturdays, Sundays and holidays) from the date of this letter.</p>

Subject	Approved Usage
Drugs	<p>The brand name should appear in italics. Do not include the registered trademark symbol (®). The correct portion of the name to italicize can usually be found by checking the manufacturer's website. For example, "<i>Synagis</i> (palivizumab) is a benefit of the Texas Medicaid Program."</p> <p>When in doubt as to the proper spelling of the drug term, use the Drugs@FDA search engine (www.fda.gov/Cder/drugsatfda/glossary.htm).</p>
Examples	<p>Use the word "example" or the phrase "for example" when giving examples. Do not use "i.e." or "e.g."</p>
Formatting for Emphasis	<p>In general, the preference is to not bold, italicize, underline, capitalize or set text in quotation marks to give it emphasis. Instead, write the text so it is clear concise and specific. In some cases, bolding text may be appropriate; for example, to emphasize a due date that is in the middle of a paragraph.</p>
Form Names and Numbers	<p>When including a reference to a specific form, write the form name exactly as it is written on the form and in title case. If a form number needs to be included, put it in parenthesis. Form numbers are not always required.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>We will mail you a Report of Change form (Form H1019).</p> <p>We sent you one or both of the following forms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicaid for Breast and Cervical Cancer Renewal Application (Form H2340). • Medicaid for Breast and Cervical Cancer Treatment Verification (Form H1551).
Health-care, Health care, Healthcare	<p>"Health care" should be written as two words. Hyphenate the two words only when modifying another word: "health-care program."</p> <p>In general, do not use the word "services" after health care because it is redundant.</p> <p>Exception: Do not use "healthcare" unless it is used in a company or program name that specifically uses it as one word (e.g., Texas Medicaid & <i>Healthcare</i> Partnership and <i>Healthcare</i> Common Procedure Coding System).</p>
Help Line, Helpline	<p>Help Line Use <i>help line</i> (two words) in most instances (a <i>help line</i> operated by HHSC).</p> <p>Helpline Use <i>helpline</i> (one word) only when the word is part of the official name of the telephone line (The Health and Human Services Commission <i>Helpline</i>).</p>
HHSC benefits office	<p>Use when referring to offices that determine eligibility for state benefits.</p>

Subject	Approved Usage
<p>Hyperlinks</p>	<p>For hard copy materials, remove special formatting such as the underline (right click on the hyperlink and choose “remove hyperlink”).</p> <p>Avoid using long hyperlinks by giving a shorter link and directions for getting to the web page or document.</p> <p>Not correct: To find an HHSC benefits office near you, visit https://www.yourtexasbenefits.com/wps/themes/html/SSPortal/downloads/H1010_April2008English.pdf</p> <p>Correct: To find an HHSC benefits office near you, visit www.hhsc.state.tx.us. Click on “How to get help.” Then click on “Search our office locations.”</p>
<p>Jargon</p>	<p>Program-related jargon or technical terminology should not be used in writing letters or other materials for consumers. Examples of such jargon include “TP” or “Type Program,” “EBT” or “electronic benefit transfer,” and “TIERS” or “Texas Integrated Eligibility Redesign System.”</p>
<p>Listing Multiple Names</p>	<p>When referencing multiple programs, do not combine the program titles. For example, use “the Integrated Care Management program and Children with Special Health Care Needs Program” rather than “the Integrated Care Management and Children with Special Health Care Needs Programs.”</p>
<p>May, Might, Must, Can</p>	<p>Be specific in the use of these words:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use <i>may</i> when referring to a recommendation or option. (“Parents <i>may</i> download an application from the website.”) • Use <i>might</i> when referring to a potential outcome or result. (“Children <i>might</i> be approved for CHIP or Children’s Medicaid.”) • Use <i>must</i> when referring to a requirement that has a legal or financial consequence. (“Parents <i>must</i> enroll their children in a health plan before coverage can begin.”) • Use <i>can</i> to express a person’s ability to do something. (“Parents can pick a primary care provider.”)
<p>Medicaid</p>	<p>Medicaid is always written as “Medicaid” or “Texas Medicaid,” not “the Medicaid Program.”</p> <p>If the name of the specific type of Medicaid program must be used, only use the full name on the first reference, then use “Medicaid” in later references.</p> <p>The initials “TP” or the phrase “Type program” should never be used in consumer materials.</p> <p>Correct: You are approved for Medicaid for Pregnant Women. You are now in the Medicaid for Pregnant Women program. You will get Medicaid for Pregnant Women.</p> <p>Not correct: You have been certified for TP 40.</p>

Subject	Approved Usage
Medicaid and CHIP Health Plans	The generic term “health plans” should not be used. Instead, specify the type of plan you’re referring to by using the terms, “Medicaid medical plan” or “Medicaid dental plan” or “CHIP medical plan” or “CHIP dental plan.” Use “medical plan” or “dental plan” on second reference.
Monetary Figures	Use a comma after the first digit, when referencing monetary figures that are four-digit whole numbers (“between \$1,000 and \$9,999”).
Numbers	<p>Most of the time, numbers should be written as numerals – 1, 6, 29, etc.</p> <p>Whenever possible, reword the sentence to avoid beginning with a number. If you must start a sentence with a number, spell out the number.</p>
Numerical Ranges	<p>In a sentence, use the word “to” as a bridge between numbers in a range. (“Answer questions 1 to 6.”)</p> <p>Never use a dash to express a range in a sentence.</p> <p>In a table, use a dash with no spaces on either side.</p>
People First	<p>Always place the person before the disability in your description if you must refer to the disability. Also, your sentence structure should tell what kind of condition a person has, not what a person is.</p> <p>Correct:</p> <p>Sarah has autism, which makes it difficult for her to stay focused.</p> <p>The man with a disability asked for help signing up for benefits.</p> <p>Not correct:</p> <p>The autistic girl, Sarah, has difficulty staying focused.</p> <p>A disabled man asked for help signing up for benefits.</p>
Personal Pronouns (I, Me, We, Us, Our, You, Your)	<p>Personal pronouns are acceptable and usually preferred in client materials.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>Send us the documents we have requested so we can finish work on your application.</p> <p>Brush your child’s teeth twice a day until they can handle brushing their teeth by themselves.</p>

Subject	Approved Usage
Phone Numbers	<p>Use "1-" in front of all phone numbers that include an area code. An exception to this might be when the number that is listed is a local call for the client and they live in a large metropolitan area like Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth. Local calls in these cities require the use of an area code, but no leading "1."</p> <p>In the case of vanity phone numbers, always present the digit-only version first.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>1-877-543-7669 (1-877-KIDS-NOW).</p> <p>1-877-847-8377 (1-877-THSTEPS)</p> <p>The term "toll-free" should always be hyphenated when referring to free long distance calls.</p>
PO Box	<p>The U.S. Post Office prefers no periods in "PO Box."</p>
Preferred Expressions	<p>Beginning – Use <i>beginning</i> ("<i>beginning</i> Dec. 1, 2009") rather than <i>as of</i> ("<i>as of</i> Dec. 1, 2009").</p>
Salutations	<p>Do not use a general greeting or closing, such as "Dear Client" or "Sincerely, HHSC" in a letter. Only use a greeting if a specifically named person is being addressed. Only use a closing if the letter is signed.</p>
Slashes	<p>Avoid using them. If you must use them, insert a space on each side of the slash.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Tell us the CHIP medical plan and main doctor you picked by filling out the Medical Enrollment / Transfer Form.</p>
State of Texas	<p>Avoid using "State of Texas" or "State" when referring to state agencies that administer programs such as Medicaid or Texas Health Steps.</p> <p>Correct: It is important to tell HHSC about your move so you can keep your Medicaid benefits.</p> <p>Not correct: It is important to tell the State about your move so you can keep your Medicaid benefits.</p>
Subject/Verb Agreement	<p>If you do not know if there are one or several children in the family, use "children" and be consistent with that use throughout the document. Do not try to cover all situations by using "child(ren)."</p>

Subject	Approved Usage
Time	<p>Show a.m. and p.m. in lowercase letters without internal space.</p> <p>When writing a specific “top of the hour” time, do not use “:00” at the end.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <p>9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.</p> <p>10 a.m. to 2 p.m.</p> <p>10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.</p> <p>In a sentence showing a range of days of the week, use the word “to” as a bridge. (“The call center is open Monday to Friday.”)</p>
Time Zone	<p>Use only “Central Time.” Do not use “Central Daylight Time” or “Central Standard Time.”</p> <p>Do not use a comma before the time zone.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Call Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central Time.</p>
TTY	<p>Most people who have a hearing problem or speech disability now use alternatives to TTY numbers to access relay services. Direct people to the state of Texas Relay Texas service, which can be accessed at 7-1-1.</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>If you have a hearing or speech disability, call 7-1-1 or any relay service.</p>
Web-based, Web page, Website	<p>The term “web” is lowercase unless it begins a sentence.</p> <p>The word “web-based” is hyphenated.</p> <p>“Web page” is two words. A web page refers to a specific page within a website.</p> <p>“Website” is one word and written in lowercase unless it begins a sentence. A website refers to a set of interconnected web pages, usually including a home page (two words), which are prepared and maintained as a collection of information by a person, group, or organization.</p>