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DHCS Reports Security Incident Involving ADHC Mailing

The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) reported on February 8, 2010, that a mailing sent to 49,352 Adult Day Health Care (ADHC) services beneficiaries inadvertently included their Social Security Numbers (SSN).

DHCS took immediate action to notify affected beneficiaries. On February 6, DHCS began sending notification letters to beneficiaries alerting them of the error. DHCS advised them how to protect themselves from identity theft, including contacting the three credit reporting agencies and placing a fraud alert on their files. At this point, there is no evidence that unauthorized parties have acquired or accessed beneficiary personal information.

“The privacy of Medi-Cal beneficiaries is a top priority for DHCS,” said DHCS Director David Maxwell-Jolly. “We have implemented additional safeguards governing the release of Social Security Numbers, and our mailing vendor has implemented additional quality control measures to prevent such errors from occurring in the future. We take any breach of secure documents very seriously, and we regret this error. We will redouble our efforts to ensure that all beneficiary information entrusted to us is aggressively and appropriately protected.”

The incident occurred on February 1, when DHCS sent a notice to ADHC beneficiaries, entitled, “Notice of Change in Medical Necessity and Eligibility Criteria for Authorization of ADHC Services.” In preparing and formatting a mailing list, beneficiaries’ SSNs were mistakenly included. The SSNs did not have spaces or dashes so they may have appeared to be a random nine-digit number to people other than the recipients. On February 4, DHCS was notified of the error and took swift action to notify beneficiaries. In addition, DHCS further strengthened its procedures to protect the privacy of beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries were advised to log on to the California Office of Privacy Protection Web site at <http://www.privacy.ca.gov> for more information about identity theft.
