Australian Government

Department of Health

Subject: Medicare Item Information

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Contents

General Information

Each professional service contained in the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) is allocated a unique item number with the description for the item.

Current item descriptions can be searched on the MBS online website. Electronic versions of the Medicare Benefits Schedule and its predecessors dating from 1974 are available on that site. The notes sections of the schedules provide additional information on the application of items. A summary of changes to the MBS appears at the front of each release of the MBS.

The MBS has changed over time as a result of:

- introduction of new items;
- ceased items;
- amended item descriptions;
- amended fees; and
- item number changes (renumbering).

While the descriptions assigned to each MBS item number can be amended over time, most amendments are minor clarifications, or reflect a policy change that expands or limits the use of the item.

To further assist users of Medicare data, three files containing Medicare item information have been created:

- Medicare Item Map;
- Reuse Item Map; and
- Historical Item Descriptions.

These files are described in this document, and are available on the 'Downloads' page of MBSOnline.

In addition, current and historical legislation can be found on the Federal Register of Legislation website. The majority of legislation relevant to Medicare Benefit Schedule changes can be found by searching legislative instruments in force and no longer in force relating to the *Health Insurance Act 1973*. Where the description file, MBS online resources, and regulations differ, the regulations in force at the relevant time should be considered the correct source.

Medicare Item Map

At the commencement of Medicare on 1 February 1984, 4 digit item numbers (i.e. numbers under 10,000) were used. With effect from 1 December 1991, item numbers were expanded to 5 digits (numbers under 100,000). An Item Map which converted the 4 digit item numbers to the new 5 digit structure was created to assist in generation of time series statistics spanning 1 December 1991.

Since 1991 the Medicare Item Map (the Item Map) has been updated on an ongoing basis with changes to the MBS. It contains both historical and current MBS items and includes approximately 12,500 items of which approximately 6,000 items are current.

The Item Map supports analysis of the MBS by mapping the original item claimed ('Item') to the most recent comparable item ('Mapped Item'). Using the Item Map ensures the system will find all occurrences of comparable historical items, even if an item has been remapped multiple times, ensuring statistics are compiled on a consistent basis over time.

Information within the Item Map, apart from start and end dates for the original items claimed ("Item"), relates to the latest mapping of an item ('Mapped Item'). For the convenience of users, the published Item Map also contains additional attributes assigned to the mapped MBS Items, including Category, Group, Sub-group and Broad Type of Service.

Restarted items

Nine items are known to have ceased then restarted with the same service description after a break. They are items 30392, 30416, 30417, 30419, 30438, 30441, 30450, 30483 and 59715.

Reused items

A small number of items were ceased then later reused for a different service type. The nature of services under these item numbers differs widely between the earlier and later periods of use.

Only information relating to the most recent use of these items is included in the Medicare Item Map. The equivalent information relating to the first use is included in the Reuse Item Map. No item number has been used more than twice since the inception of Medicare.

A summary listing of items identified as having been reused, and their initial start and end dates, are shown in the table below.

Reused item numbers – first use

Item	FLAG	Mapped item	First Use Start Date (at or before)	First Use End Date (at or after)
0001	1-RECLF	0001	1 Feb 1984	30 Nov 1989
0002	1-RECLF	0002	1 Feb 1984	30 Nov 1989
0801	1-RECLF	11621	1 Aug 1988	30 Nov 1991
0803	1-RECLF	11000	1 Feb 1984	30 Nov 1991
0809	1-RECLF	11009	1 Feb 1984	30 Nov 1991
0811	1-RECLF	11015	1 Feb 1984	30 Nov 1991
0813	1-RECLF	11018	1 Feb 1984	30 Nov 1991
18212	2-REUSE	18212	1 Dec 1991	31 Oct 1993
30492	2-REUSE	30512	1 Dec 1991	31 Oct 1992
30495	2-REUSE	30515	1 Dec 1991	31 Oct 1992
30564	2-REUSE	30596	1 Dec 1991	31 Oct 1992
38485	2-REUSE	38485	1 Nov 1992	30 Jun 1993
30392	3-RESTR	30392	1 Dec 1991	OPEN
30416	3-RESTR	30416	1 Dec 1991	OPEN
30417	3-RESTR	30417	1 Apr 1992	OPEN
30419	3-RESTR	30419	1 Dec 1991	OPEN
30438	3-RESTR	30438	1 Dec 1991	OPEN
30441	3-RESTR	30441	1 Dec 1991	OPEN
30450	3-RESTR	30450	1 Dec 1991	OPEN
30483	3-RESTR	30483	1 Dec 1991	OPEN
59715	3-RESTR	59715	1 Dec 1991	OPEN

For analysis of services with these item numbers prior to 1994 both the Medicare Item Map and the Reuse Item Map should be consulted, depending on the service date, to ensure appropriate categorisation and interpretation.

All 'first uses' of items had ceased by 1994. The Reuse Item Map may be safely ignored for analysis confined to data with service dates in 1994 or later, or excluding these item numbers.

Historical descriptions for both the first and later use of these items is included in the Historical Item Descriptions file.

Historical Item Descriptions

Since 1992, the published Medicare Benefits Schedule has been created by a database application and item numbers in force have been captured electronically. Some descriptions produced by the database do not contain the full context as given in legislation as they were written for the published book layout, which includes notes that are not captured in the individual descriptions.

Item descriptions in force prior to 1992 were not included in the database or maintained in consistent electronic format. As the majority of MBS items were renumbered in 1991 a very large number of item descriptions were affected. The historical file includes descriptions for these historical items, based on historical MBS publications and legislation.The file includes the first use of 'reused' items. However, it is not a full reconstruction of all amendments to descriptions.

Description variations for an item may be missing and description start dates may in some cases be earlier than those listed.

As a result, the historical item description file has limitations, particularly for those item numbers that ceased being used prior to 1992. As changes to MBS item descriptions are usually incremental, the nature of services provided under a given item number at different points in time will in most cases be very similar.

Interpretation of symbols in item descriptions

The following provides an indication of the meaning of some symbols found appended to Medicare items. The meaning of the symbols may change in different parts of the schedule and over time. The following should be used as an indication only - relevant legislation for the year in question should be examined to determine the correct meaning of these or other symbols encountered.

(Anaes.) and (Assist.)

If the service attracts an anaesthetic, the word (Anaes.) appears following the description. Where an operation qualifies for the payment of benefits for an assistant, the relevant items are identified by the inclusion of the word (Assist.) in the item description.

(S) and (G) items

In some cases two levels of fees are applied to the same service, with each level of fee being allocated a separate item number. The item identified by the letter (S) applies in the case where the procedure has been rendered by a recognised specialist in the practice of his or her specialty and the patient has been referred. The item identified by the letter (G) applies in any other circumstance.

(K) and (NK) items:

Items which contain the symbol (K) at the end of the item are used for services which are performed on newer diagnostic imaging equipment. The date of service must be less than ten years after the date on which the CT equipment was first installed in Australia. In the case of imported pre-used CT equipment, the services must have been performed on a date which is less than ten years from the first date of manufacture of the equipment. Services performed in remote areas may have had exemptions which allow them to claim on (K) items for older equipment.

Items descriptions which contain the symbol (NK) were performed on older equipment.

(R) and (NR) items:

Items relating to diagnostic imaging services may have the symbol (R) for 'requested' or (NR) for 'not requested'.

Medicare benefits are not payable for diagnostic imaging services that are classified as R-type (requested) services unless, prior to commencing the relevant service, the practitioner receives a signed and dated request from a requesting practitioner who determined the service was necessary.

(D)

Items rendered in an operating theatre of a hospital in the course of a dental practice by a dental practitioner approved by the minister for the purposes of the definition of 'professional service' are marked with the symbol (D).

(AO), (AOS) and (AD)

Items that include the symbol (AO) are limited to services provided by a dental practitioner registered in the specialty of orthodontics or a dental practitioner who is not registered in the specialty of orthodontics but has been assessed by the Australian Society of Orthodontists as competent in the field of orthodontics.

Items that include the symbol (AOS) are limited to services provided by dental practitioners with particular orthodontic qualifications in some parts of the schedule, and to services provided by medical practitioners registered in the specialty of oral and maxillofacial surgery in others. Users are advised to check the legislation for the year of interest.

Items that include the symbol (AD) are limited to services provided by a dental practitioner.

(SP), (PP), (OP), (RP)

These symbols relate to services provided on or behalf of Approved Pathology Practitioners:

(SP) relates to services provided by specialist pathologists in private practice (ie not services for hospital in-patients or out-patients).

(PP) relates to services provided by specialist pathologists in the exercise of private practice in recognised hospitals, tertiary institutions or other Government supported facilities.

(RP) services are provided by practitioners who are not specialist pathologists and who are in in the exercise of private practice in recognised hospitals, tertiary institutions or other Government supported facilities

(OP) services are provided by practitioners who are not specialist pathologists and who are in private practice (i.e. not for hospital patients).

(PP) and (RP) are not used in all years. Where only (SP) and (OP) are not used, (OP) relates to all services provided in other than the conditions for the symbol (SP).

(SP), (HP) and (OP)

Items with the symbol (SP) apply to pathology requests in certain laboratories in respect of a person who was at that time a private patient in a recognized hospital and where the pathology equipment, or staff member, of certain types of laboratory was used.

Items with the symbol (HP) apply to pathology requests in certain laboratories in respect of a person who was at that time a private patient in a recognized hospital and where the pathology equipment, or a staff member, of certain types of laboratory was used.

The symbol (OP) applies to pathology services other than those marked (HP) or (SP).

(C) and (NC)

The symbols (C) and (NC) relate to services rendered with the use of a radioisotope imaging scanner at a nuclear medicine unit. Services with (C) are rendered at a facility that has computerised processing facilities capable of being used in the rendering of the service, services with (NC) do not.

(HR) and (OR)

Items including the symbol (HR) relate services rendered with the use of any computerized axial tomography equipment of a recognized hospital or a radiology unit included in a prescribed class of radiology units.

Items including the symbol (OR) relate to the services when rendered otherwise than with the use of any computerized axial tomography equipment of a recognized hospital or a radiology unit included in a prescribed class of radiology units.

(AU)

The symbol AU followed by a number is a reference between surgical items and connected anaesthetic items.

9,000-9,999 range

Prior to 1992 numbers in the range 9000 to 9999 were used for items added to the schedule by ministerial determination between major schedule rewrites. They were usually temporary, to be replaced by a permanent item number at a later major revision of the schedule.

File specifications

Medicare Item Map

File naming convention:

- **'yyyymm_MBSONLINE_IMAP.TXT'**
- yyyy and mm represent the year and month of production of the Medicare Item Map.
- Fields are TAB delimited.

Field Name	Length	Description
ITEM	5(CHAR)	MBS Item under which the claim was processed. E.g. '00023' or '36840'
MAPPED_ITEM	5(CHAR)	MBS Item against which the data is reported
ITEM_START_DATE	10(CHAR) dd/mm/yyyy	Date the MBS item started or estimated start date
ITEM_END_DATE	10(CHAR) dd/mm/yyyy	Date the MBS item ended or estimated end date
ITEM_REUSE_FLAG	1(CHAR)	See Reuse Item Map for more details Indicates if Item has been re-used over time. See Item Description History file available as MBS Online and Reuse Item Map section of this document 1. RECLF - Item has been reused and reclassified. Description AND Classification changed. There has been a significant gap in activity 2. REUSE - Item has been reused. Description has changed but not the classification. There has been a significant gap in activity 3. RESTR - RE-STARTED - Description mostly unchanged. There has been a significant gap in activity
MAPPED_ITEM_DESC	Variable	Latest description available for the Mapped Item
MAPPED_ITEM_CATEGORY	2(CHAR)	MBS Category classification for the Mapped Item e.g. '04' or '10'
MAPPED_ITEM_GROUP	3(CHAR)	MBS Group classification for the Mapped Item e.g. 'A01' OR 'A18'
MAPPED_ITEM_SUBGROUP	5(CHAR)	MBS Group with Subgroup for the Mapped Item e.g. 'A1804' - Group A18 Subgroup 4
CATEGORY_DESC	Variable	MBS Category Description for the Mapped Item
GROUP_DESC	Variable	MBS Group Description for the Mapped Item
SUBGROUP_DESC	Variable	MBS Subgroup Description for the Mapped Item
BTOS	4(CHAR)	Broad Type of Service (BTOS) hierarchy or reporting order for the Mapped Item
BTOS_DESC	Variable	BTOS Description for the Mapped Item
MODIFY_BBI_FLAG	1(CHAR)	1 = Bulk Billing Incentive Item 2 = Modifier Item Services against these items are not counted in reports. These items are top-up items representing incentive or supplementary payments. To count the number of services for these items would result in multiple counting of services. Other measures such as Benefits are counted and reported for these items.

Reuse Item Map

File naming convention:

- **'MBSONLINE_REUSE_IMAP.TXT'**
- Fields are TAB delimited.

The Reuse Item Map will not be updated as frequently as the Medicare Item Map as item numbers are no longer reused and remapping of items is infrequent.

Field specifications are as for the Medicare Item Map.

Field Name	Length	Description
REUSE_ITEM	5(CHAR)	MBS Item under which the claim was processed. E.g. '00023' or '36840'
REUSE_ITEM_FLAG	1(CHAR)	Indicates if Item has been reused over time. See Item Description History file available as MBS Online and REUSE Item Map section of this document 1. RECLF - Item has been reused and reclassified. Description AND Classification changed. There has been a significant gap in activity 2. REUSE - Item has been reused. Description has changed but not the classification. There has been a significant gap in activity 3. RESTR - RE-STARTED - Description mostly unchanged. There has been a significant gap in activity
REUSE_FLAG_DESC	5(CHAR)	
REUSE_ITEM_START_DATE	10(CHAR) dd/mm/yyyy	Date the MBS item started or estimated start date
REUSE_ITEM_END_DATE	10(CHAR) dd/mm/yyyy	Date the MBS item ended or estimated end date
REUSE _ITEM_CATEGORY	2(CHAR)	MBS Category classification for the Mapped Item. e.g. '04' or '10'
REUSE _ITEM_GROUP	3(CHAR)	MBS Group classification for the Mapped Item. e.g. 'A01' or 'A18'
REUSE _ITEM_SUBGROUP	5(CHAR)	MBS Group with Subgroup for the Mapped Item e.g. 'A1804' - Group A18 Subgroup 4
REUSE_BTOS	4(CHAR)	Broad Type of Service (BTOS) hierarchy or reporting order for the Mapped Item
CATEGORY_DESC	Variable	MBS Category Description for the Mapped Item
GROUP_DESC	Variable	MBS Group Description for the Mapped Item
SUBGROUP_DESC	Variable	MBS Subgroup Description for the Mapped Item
BTOS_DESC	Variable	BTOS Description for the Mapped Item

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Historical Item Descriptions

Naming convention:

- **'yyyymm_MBSONLINE_DESC.TXT'**
- Where yyyy and mm represent the year and month of production of the descriptions file.
- Fields are TAB delimited.

Field name	Length	Description
ITEM	5	MBS Item number
ITEM_DESC_START_DATE	dd/mm/yyyy	The start date of the description (after 1991), or date that the description was known to be in effect (1991 and earlier).
ITEM_DESC	Variable	A description of the type of service that applied to that item number from the Description Start date.

Importing the files with Excel or SAS

Excel instructions

To import '**yyyymm_MBSONLINE_IMAP.TXT**' Item Map file:

Step 0:   File > Open

Step 1:   Choose 'Delimited'

Step 2:   Ensure Tab is ticked.

Step 3:   Read all columns in as Text otherwise Excel will remove the leading zero(s).

Example SAS Program Code

To read in '**yyyymm_MBSONLINE_IMAP.TXT**'

All fields are intended to be read or imported in as Text. This is to ensure that any leading zeros are retained on the Item and Classification Codes.

```sas
FILENAME IMAP "/filepath/yyyymm_MBSONLINE_IMAP.TXT";

DATA ITEMMAP ;
infile IMAP missover dsd dlm='09'x firstobs=2 LRECL=20000;
input
        ITEM                    : $5.
        MAPPED_ITEM             : $5.
        Item_Start_Date         : $10.
        Item_End_Date           : $10.
        Item_reuse_flag         : $1.
        Mapped_Item_Desc        : $8192.
        Mapped_Item_Category    : $2.
        Mapped_Item_Group       : $3.
        Mapped_Item_Subgroup    : $5.
        CATEGORY_DESC           : $150.
        GROUP_DESC              : $200.
        SUBGROUP_DESC           : $250.
        BTOS                    : $4.
        BTOS_DESC               : $50.
        MODIFY_BBI_FLAG         : $1.
;
RUN;
```

To read in '**yyyymm_MBSONLINE_DESC.TXT**'

```sas
*** read back in as a test ;
FILENAME desc "filepath/yyyymm_MBSONLINE_DESC.TXT";

DATA ITEM_DESCRIPTIONS ;
infile desc missover dsd dlm='09'X firstobs=2  LRECL=20000 ;
input
        Item                    : $5.
        Description             : $8192.
        Description_Start       : $10.
;
RUN;
```

To read in '**MBSONLINE_REUSE_IMAP.TXT'**

All fields are intended to be read or imported in as Text. This is to ensure that any leading zeros are retained on the Item and Classification Codes.

```
FILENAME RUIMAP "/filepath/MBSONLINE_REUSE_IMAP.TXT";

DATA REUSE_ITEMMAP ;
infile RUIMAP missover dsd dlm='09'x firstobs=2 LRECL=900;
input
        REUSE_ITEM                  : $5.
        REUSE_Item_flag             : $1.
        REUSE_Flag_Desc             : $5.
        REUSE_Item_Start_Date       : $10.
        REUSE_Item_End_Date         : $10.
        REUSE_Item_Category         : $2.
        REUSE_Item_Group            : $3.
        REUSE_Item_Subgroup         : $5.
        REUSE_BTOS                  : $4.
        CATEGORY_DESC               : $150.
        GROUP_DESC                  : $200.
        SUBGROUP_DESC               : $250.
        BTOS_DESC                   : $50.
;
RUN;
```