



*Helping Older Persons with Legal &
Long-Term Care Problems*

Medicaid Estate Recovery

1. What Is The Medicaid Estate Recovery (MER) Program?

Medicaid Estate Recovery is a federally mandated program that began in Ohio January 1, 1995. When a Medicaid recipient dies, the MER Program attempts to recover from their estates what Medicaid paid for services provided. MER is only from the estates of Medicaid recipients aged 55 years or older in the amount of all Medicaid benefits correctly paid after the individual attained age 55 and Medicaid benefits correctly paid to a person of any age that was permanently institutionalized. [\[1\]](#)

2. What Medicaid Services Are Subject To Recovery By MER?

Medicaid services subject to MER are defined as any medical assistance correctly paid by Medicaid. However, for those Medicaid recipients age 55 and older and not permanently institutionalized, the amount Medicaid paid for Medicare Cost Sharing Programs, such as QMB (Qualified Medicare Beneficiary), SLMB (Special Low Income Medicare Beneficiary) or QI-1 (Qualified Individuals-1), after January 1, 2010 is not subject to estate recovery. [\[2\]](#)

3. What Is The MER Estate?

The MER estate includes all real and personal property in which the Medicaid recipient had any legal interest at the moment before death, including assets conveyed to others at death via survivorship, transfer-on-death and living trusts. [\[3\]](#) The MER program is permitted recovery to the extent of the deceased Medicaid recipient's interest in such property. Note that after the death of the Medicaid recipient, any property Medicaid determined exempt for purposes of determining Medicaid eligibility is no longer exempt and is subject to MER recovery. [\[4\]](#)

4. Who Administers The MER Program?

The Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) and the Ohio Attorney General's Office (AGO) administer the MER Program. [\[5\]](#) At the time of application or re-application for Medicaid, the County Department of Job and Family Services (CDJFS), through ODM Form 07400, informs Medicaid recipients of the MER Program. [\[6\]](#)

5. When Are Medicaid Costs Recovered?

By law, MER can only be made after the death of the Medicaid recipient. However, MER cannot occur even then if the Medicaid recipient has

- a) a surviving spouse, or
- b) a child who is under age twenty-one, or
- c) a child of any age who is blind or permanently and totally disabled as determined by Social Security.

Furthermore, no recovery may be made from a home while either of the following Medicaid recipient's relatives lawfully reside in the home

- a) A sibling who resided in the home for at least one year immediately before the date the Medicaid recipient was permanently institutionalized; or
- b) A child who resided in the home for at least two years immediately before the Medicaid recipient was permanently institutionalized, and on a continuous basis since that time, and provided care that delayed institutionalization. [\[7\]](#)

6. What Are The Medicaid Estate Recovery Methods?

MER recovery methods vary depending on the asset type and whether a Probate estate was opened for the deceased. Recovery methods used by ODM include filing a creditor's claim in a Probate estate, filing an Affidavit on Facts Relating to Title, collection letters and Medicaid Liens. [\[8\]](#)

7. Will ODM File A Medicaid Lien On My Real Estate During My Lifetime?

No. Though ODM has statutory authority to impose Medicaid Liens on real estate owned by Medicaid recipients during their lifetime under certain circumstances, ODM does not exercise this option. [\[9\]](#) However, ODM has filed post-death Medicaid liens on real estate after the death of the Medicaid recipient. ODM also files Affidavits on Facts Relating to Title on the surviving spouse's home, although it will be removed if the surviving spouse wants to sell the home

8. What Is An Affidavit On Facts Relating To Title?

Affidavits on Facts Relating to Title are authorized to be filed in the county recorder's office for the purpose of stating facts that may affect title to real estate. [\[10\]](#) ODM is filing such affidavits against real estate in which the Medicaid recipient had a legal interest at the moment before death. The affidavit states the facts and amount of

the Medicaid Estate Recovery claim and further states that this claim may represent a valid claim against the real estate.

Such affidavits have the practical effect of putting a question (cloud) on the title of the real estate. In other words, a potential buyer usually wants the affidavit on file removed prior to purchasing the property. By filing Affidavits on Facts Relating to Title, ODM forces the owners of real estate to contact ODM regarding its MER claim prior to selling the real estate.

In addition, MER reporting forms must be completed by a surviving tenant or TOD beneficiary and sent to the MER program administrator. [\[11\]](#) Real estate included in the deceased's Probate estate is subject to the claims of creditors, including MER.

9. How Does ODM Know When A Probate Estate Is Filed?

If the decedent was fifty-five years of age or older at the time of death or permanently institutionalized, the person responsible for the estate must determine whether the decedent was, at any time, a Medicaid recipient. The "person responsible for the estate" means the executor, administrator, commissioner or person who filed for release from administration of an estate in Probate court.

If so, the administrator must complete and file with Probate court, a MER reporting form that lists all the assets that are part of the Medicaid recipient's estate. [\[12\]](#) A knowing false statement on the form is a first-degree misdemeanor. The person responsible for an estate must also mark the appropriate box on the appropriate Probate form to indicate compliance with the requirements listed above. Probate court must then mail a copy of the MER reporting form to the MER Program Administrator, who may then file a MER claim against the estate.

10. What If There Is No Real Estate Or Probate Estate?

Sometimes a Medicaid recipient dies owning very little other than some personal belongings and a personal needs account (PNA). In such cases, the MER recovery method may be a letter to the next of kin setting forth the MER claim and requesting information about the deceased's assets. After death of a Medicaid recipient who resided in a nursing home, the home can use the PNA account for funeral expenses. Otherwise, the home is to pay the funds to the resident's estate representative. If there is none, the home pays these funds to ODM. [\[13\]](#)

11. Can MER Be Avoided?

The best way to avoid MER is for the Medicaid recipient to transfer all assets to his/her spouse prior to death. Medicaid in fact requires such transfers within one year of Medicaid eligibility, but assets should be transferred as soon as possible. [\[14\]](#)

If the Medicaid recipient died owning assets, tell MER if there is a surviving spouse, minor or disabled child (of any age), which will preclude recovery. In addition, a sibling or child who resides in the home may be able to postpone recovery. [\[15\]](#)

ODM is also required to forgo recovery where it would work an undue hardship. What constitutes an undue hardship is assessed on a case-by-case basis and the circumstances must be compelling. One example of compelling circumstances is where the survivor is age sixty-five or older and financially dependent upon receipt of the estate proceeds. [\[16\]](#)

An undue hardship waiver may be requested by an heir within thirty calendar days after notice of the estate recovery claim was mailed by the AGO. [\[17\]](#) The granting of an undue hardship waiver may involve either a permanent waiver of recovery efforts, or a temporary deferral or postponement of recovery while the hardship exists, including negotiation of a modified recovery agreement or the imposition of a lien on property.

12. Can I Get Help With An MER Claim?

Yes. Pro Seniors' Senior Legal Hotline for Older Ohioans offers free legal advice over the telephone to Ohio residents age 60 and older. Call (800) 488-6070 to schedule an appointment.

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Pro Seniors' Legal Hotline for Older Ohioans provides free legal information and advice by toll-free telephone to all residents of Ohio age 60 or older. If you have a concern that cannot be resolved over the phone, then the hotline will try to match you with an attorney who will handle your problem at a fee you can afford.

In southwest Ohio, Pro Seniors' staff attorneys and long-term care ombudsmen handle matters that private attorneys do not, such as nursing facility, adult care facility, home care, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, protective services, insurance and landlord/tenant problems.

This pamphlet provides general information and not legal advice. The law is complex and changes frequently. Before you apply this information to a particular situation, call Pro Seniors' free Legal Hotline or consult an attorney in elder law.

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Endnotes: [*Click the endnote number "[1]" to return to the text*]

- [1] [Ohio Administrative Code \(OAC\) § 5160:1-2-07\(C\)](#) Medicaid: estate recovery
- [2] [OAC § 5160:1-2-07\(C\)\(2\)](#); Medicaid: estate recovery;
[OAC § 5160:1-3-02.1](#) Medicare premium assistance programs (MPAP)
- [3] [42 USC § 1396p\(b\)\(4\)](#) For purposes of this subsection, the term “estate”, with respect to a deceased individual—
- [4] [O.A.C. §5160:1-7-07\(G\)\(2\)](#) The following resources, which are not considered a resource at eligibility determination, will not be disregarded during estate recovery
- [5] [Ohio Revised Code \(RC\) § 5162.212](#) Certification of amounts due under estate recovery program; collection
- [6] [Ohio Department of Medicaid Form 07400](#) Ohio Medicaid Estate Recovery
- [7] [RC § 5162.21](#) Medicaid estate recovery program.
[RC § 5162.21\(C\)](#) No adjustment or recovery may be made under division (B)(1) of this section.
- [8] [RC § 5162.211](#) Lien against property of recipient or spouse as part of estate recovery program
- [9] [RC § 5162.211](#) Lien against property of recipient or spouse as part of estate recovery program
- [10] [RC § 5301.252](#) Recording affidavit relating to title
- [11] [RC § 5302.221](#) Transfer on death deed Medicaid estate recovery form
[RC § 5309.082](#) Survivorship tenant Medicaid estate recovery form

[12] [RC § 2117.061](#) Notice of receipt of Medicaid benefits to administrator of estate recovery program

[13] [OAC § 5160-3-16.5\(H\)](#) Nursing facilities (NFs): personal needs allowance (PNA) accounts and other resident funds

[14] [OAC § 5160:1-6-04\(E\)\(9\)](#) Medicaid: treatment of income and resources for an institutionalized spouse with a spouse in the community

[15] See paragraph 5, above.

[16] [OAC § 5160:1-2-07\(H\)](#) The ODM director, or designee, may grant an undue hardship waiver on a case-by-case basis when there are compelling circumstances

[17] [OAC § 5160:1-2-07\(I\)](#) Request for undue hardship waiver