

Notice of Deprecation

25 November 2024

Concept Non Current Indicators

Summary

SNOMED International intends to deprecate Concept Non Current (CNC) indicators in the 2025-04-01 International Edition of SNOMED CT, subject to feedback. The plan is to stop adding these indicators to active descriptions when the concept they are attached to is made inactive. Additionally, all currently active CNC indicators will be made inactive. They will be left in place as inactive components.

This deprecation is not expected to have any impact on existing SNOMED CT implementations but will instead simplify the product and reduce associated maintenance costs.

A form for providing feedback on this notice of deprecation can be found below.

Background

Concept Non Current (CNC) indicators are a type of inactivation indicator that are applied to *active* descriptions, when the concept they are attached to is made inactive. They are intended to allow implementers to show some visual cue to alert users that a description they have searched for relates to an inactive concept.

Reasons for Removal

The rationale for removing Concept Non Current (CNC) indicators is as follows:

- Systems that import descriptions and inactivation indicators will necessarily also import concepts. Therefore any concept in an inactive state will already be known. Having separate inactivation indicators on *each* description to say that the concept is inactive, is unnecessary and needlessly increases the file size of SNOMED CT archives.
- CNC indicators are generally not well understood and add to the perceived complexity of SNOMED CT. They are logically confusing as they are *inactivation* indicators but we apply them to *active* components. Stopping their use will also simplify training and documentation.

- CNC indicators are costly in terms of the software and validation that is required to ensure that they are consistently applied. Removing them from systems will allow implementers to simplify software and reduce fault investigation.
- CNC indicators originated in the RF1 file format - the predecessor to the current RF2 specification. In RF1 they were more straightforward as they were marked directly on the Description itself. In the development of the RF2 specification, this feature was translated into a separate reference set, but this resulted in a solution that was more complicated than just checking the active state of the concept.
- SNOMED International has not yet encountered any vendor or implementor who has said that they use these indicators. In conference discussion there has been unanimous agreement in the community that these components are redundant and that ceasing to use them is desirable.

Timeframe & Mechanism

SNOMED International proposes that the deprecation of Concept Non Current Indicators should progress via the following release milestones:

Release	Deprecation Step
SNOMED International Edition 2025-04-01	Stop adding new Concept Non Current Indicators. Inactivate all existing active Concept Non Current Indicators.

This is a one step cessation and inactivation. Normally, deprecations might be expected to take a more phased approach. However, in this case, if we were to stop adding new indicators but leave existing indicators active, then the content would be left in an inconsistent state. We would see some active descriptions announcing that their attached concept is inactive, and others failing to do so. It was thought to be preferable to make a clean break.

There is an additional issue around descriptions which are themselves subsequently made inactive. Ideally they would receive a more appropriate inactivation indicator (like “Outdated” or “Non Conformance To Editorial Policy”), but instead we see that they often get left with a CNC indicator. Leaving active CNC indicators in the system would result in an ongoing drip-increase in CNC indicators inappropriately attached to inactive descriptions.

The date of 2025-04-01 was chosen to avoid temporary maintenance work. However, this date could be changed if feedback received indicated that a different date is required.

Impact and Mitigation

This deprecation would only affect SNOMED CT systems which make use of Concept Non Current Indicators in some way, most probably in some visual warning to the user that the concept the descriptions are attached to has been made inactive. It is unlikely that such systems exist, as it is logically much simpler to determine the active state of the concept directly from the concept itself.

If systems *do* exist, which are making active use of CNC indicators, then options for mitigating their bulk inactivation include:

- Adjust software to instead determine the active status of a concept via the active flag on the concept itself or,
- Re-activate these CNC Indicators locally where appropriate, prior to import into production systems

These changes need only be made prior to importing any SNOMED CT Edition which is dependent on the International Edition on or after 2025-04-01. Potentially this might be some time after that date, depending on National Release Centre (NRC) and Vendor's update schedules.

In addition to the impact to systems, consideration should be given to existing documentation and training materials. The RF2 Specification, for example, has very little to say about CNC indicators, with one reference here: [5.2.1.3 Attribute Value Reference Set](#). Additional checks will need to be done in training courses such as the [SNOMED CT Foundation Course](#), however these changes cannot be made before this deprecation notice has been issued, and time given for responses to be made.

Concept Non Current indicators are not being made “illegal”, and the concept that represents them is not planned for inactivation. Producers of SNOMED CT Extensions may continue to use these indicators if they wish, and are not required to inactivate their own indicators. However they will no longer be maintained by SNOMED International, including extensions produced by SNOMED International's Managed Service.

Communication

The dissemination of this deprecation notice is expected to follow these stages:

1. Agreement by the SNOMED International Senior Management Team
2. A Member Forum Briefing Note. Unless objections are received from the MF, the deprecation notice would then be issued to/via:
 - a. SNOMED International Working and Advisory Groups
 - b. A blog post on the SNOMED International website
 - c. Release Notes, particularly in the “Early Visibility” section.
 - d. Release Management email channels
 - e. NRCs, with a request that they forward this notice to downstream users of the extension they produce.
 - f. Known users in the community

Feedback

SNOMED International invites feedback on this deprecation notice, which should be received by 12 February 2025, by filling in [this feedback form](#). Responses to feedback received will be posted as an update to this page.