

What you should know about Medicare's Star Ratings survey quality measures

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) publishes the Medicare Part C and D Star Ratings each year to measure the quality of health and drug services received by beneficiaries enrolled in Medicare Advantage (MA) and Prescription Drug Plans (PDPs or Part D plans). The Star Ratings also reflect the experiences of beneficiaries and assist beneficiaries in finding the best plan for them. The Star Ratings support CMS' efforts, along with CarePlus, to put the patient first. As part of this effort, patients should be empowered to work with their health plan and healthcare providers to make healthcare decisions that best suit their needs.

Patient experience has become a focal point for CMS, which increased the weight of patient experience/complaints and access measures from two to four. This change reflects CMS' commitment to serve Medicare beneficiaries by putting patients first, including their assessments of the care received by their health plan and providers alike.

What are the CMS surveys?

Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®)

The CAHPS program is a multiyear survey administered by CMS to assess patients' experiences with healthcare. These surveys focus on aspects of quality that patients are best qualified to assess, such as rating the quality of healthcare received and the ease of access to healthcare services.

CMS selects a random sample of health plan members from eligible MA contracts to participate in CAHPS. More details on the CAHPS survey and how it applies to MA plans can be found at ma-pdpcahps.org/.

The Health Outcomes Survey (HOS)

HOS assesses the ability of an MA organization to maintain or improve the physical and mental health of its members over time. A random sample of health plan members is selected from eligible MA contracts to participate in the HOS program each year. The surveys are administered between August and November. More details about HOS measures can be found at www.hosonline.org/.

CAHPS and HOS ratings account for 41% of the overall CMS Star quality ratings for measurement year 2021. When these quality ratings improve, it is an indicator that your CarePlus-covered patients are receiving the care they need and enjoying healthier, happier and more productive lives.

Physicians drive performance on the following CAHPS and HOS quality measures. You will find impactful talking points and advice beneath each measure.

- Annual Flu Vaccine
 - Percentage of sampled patients who received an influenza vaccination since the previous July
 - Ask patients if they received the flu vaccination.

- **Obtaining Needed Care composite measure**
Patients rate how often it was easy to get appointments with specialists and how often it was easy to get the care, tests or treatment they needed through their health plan in the previous six months.
 - Make scheduling as easy as possible. Ask staff to schedule specialist appointments and write down the details for your patients.
- **Getting Appointments and Care Quickly composite measure**
Patients rate how often they were able to schedule an appointment and get care as soon as needed in the previous six months. Patients also rate how often they saw the person they came to see within 15 minutes of their appointment time.
 - Break up wait times by moving patients from the waiting room into an exam room to take vitals.
 - Contact your patients when delays are expected by using telephone, text or email.
 - Advise patients of the best days or times to schedule appointments.
- **Overall Rating of Healthcare Quality**
On a 0 to 10 scale, patients rate their healthcare in the previous six months.
 - Ask open-ended questions to give your patients a chance to disclose health issues and concerns.
 - A quick explanation for lengthy wait times has been shown to markedly improve patient satisfaction.
- **Overall Rating of Plan**
On a 0 to 10 scale, patients rate their health plan.
 - Remind your CarePlus-covered patients about possible rewards for obtaining certain preventive services, such as a flu vaccination.
 - Encourage members to use health plan resources (e.g., SilverSneakers) and register for the member portal.
- **Coordination of Care composite measure**
Patients rate their physicians' familiarity with their medical history and prescriptions, how well physicians are following up with patients after tests and how well "personal doctors" are managing care with specialists or other healthcare providers.
 - Encourage patients to bring their CarePlus SmartSummary® statement to doctor visits.
 - Expedite the time it takes to follow up on blood tests, X-rays and other tests.
 - Remind patients to bring a list of their prescriptions.
 - Prior to appointments, speak with patient's specialists to review the care they have provided.
- **Obtaining Medications**
Patients rate how often in the last six months it was easy to use their health plan to obtain prescribed medicines, to fill a prescription at a local pharmacy and to use their health plan to fill prescriptions by mail.
 - Use the formulary to identify CarePlus-covered medicines.
 - Consider 90-day fills.
 - Synchronize medications, when appropriate.
 - Work prior authorizations in a timely manner, and set expectations with patients regarding resolution time if a prior authorization is needed. To submit a prior authorization for your patient, call 1-866-315-7587, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m., Eastern time.
- **Improving or Maintaining Physical Health**
Patients report whether their physical health is the same as or better than expected in the past two years.
 - Praise your patients' physical health when possible and encourage them to stay positive.
 - Leverage plan resources, such as the SilverSneakers fitness program.

- **Improving or Maintaining Mental Health**
Patients report whether their mental health is the same as or better than expected in the past two years.
 - Ask about your patients' mental health. Simple recommendations, such as increased social activity, exercise and healthy eating, can have a big impact on a patient's sense of emotional well-being.
- **Monitoring Physical Activity**
Patients report whether they have discussed exercise with their doctor and if they were advised to start, increase or maintain their physical activity level during the year.
 - Strengthen recommendations by being specific. For example, suggest walking at a particular local park or shopping mall so patients have a specific, actionable idea.
- **Improving Bladder Control**
Patients who report having a urine leakage problem are asked whether they have discussed it with their doctor. Those who have are asked if they received treatment for the problem.
 - When you recommend Kegel exercises or other less conventional remedies, emphasize that you are providing treatment options so patients will take your recommendations seriously.
 - Recommend treatment options no matter the frequency or severity of the bladder control problem.
- **Reducing the Risk of Falling**
Patients who had a fall or problems with balance and discussed it with their doctor or other healthcare provider are asked whether they received a fall-risk intervention in the last year.
 - In the United States, about one in four adults (28%) age 65 and older report falling each year.*
 - Remind patients that installing handrails or using a cane can help prevent falls.
 - Review medications for potential side effects that include dizziness or drowsiness.

CarePlus resources

Perfect Experience Program (PXP): CarePlus has a program in place designed to enhance provider and vendor patient experience and health outcomes metrics and comprehension. PXP educators support providers and staff through education and best practices, host patient presentations in a physician office setting and provide leave-behind informational and educational materials (branded and unbranded). For more information, please email CPHP.STARSDEPT@CarePlus-hp.com.

Patient Experience Circle (PXC): PXC is an initiative under the PXP. It was developed to educate CarePlus-covered patients on survey participation, CAHPS and HOS measures and the influence of their perceptions/opinions. The goal of PXC is to engage membership in health plan resources, motivate members to actively pursue health, and support health plan operations in the collection of member/patient experience and health outcome metrics. For more information, please email CPHP.STARSDEPT@CarePlus-hp.com.

CarePlus Link: a series of educational presentations on a variety of informational topics that only CarePlus members can join by phone or online, at no additional charge. CarePlus Link consists of members, staff, facilitators and presenters who value the continued growth and balance around the physical, mental, social and lifestyle choices that promote health and wellness. Please refer members to www.careplushealthplans.com/members/link for more information.

* Facts about falls. (2017, February 10). Retrieved March 9, 2021, from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/falls/facts.html.