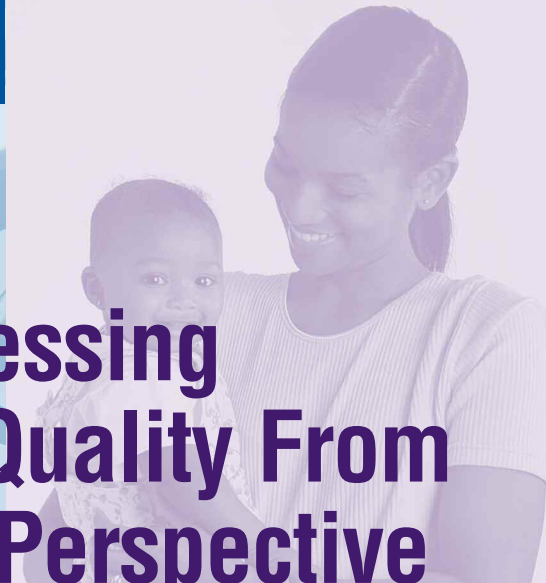
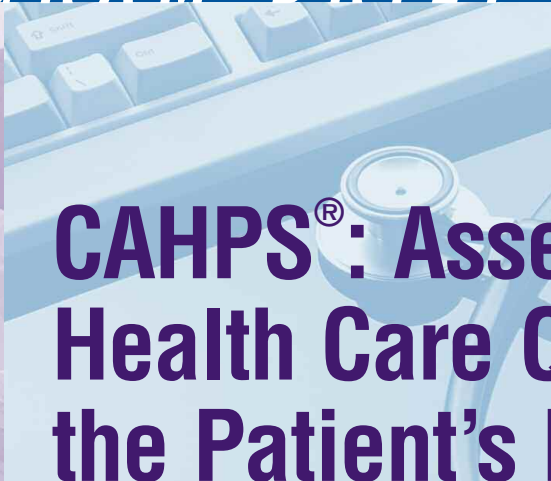
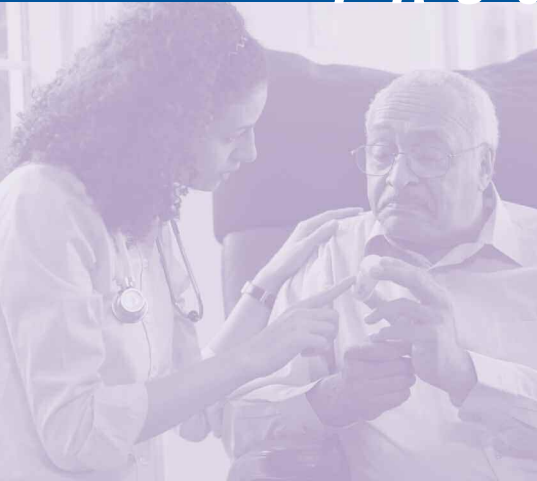


PROGRAM BRIEF



CAHPS®: Assessing Health Care Quality From the Patient's Perspective

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's (AHRQ's) mission is to produce evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable, and to work with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other partners to make sure that the evidence is understood and used.

AHRQ's priority areas of focus are:

- Improve health care quality by accelerating implementation of patient-centered outcomes research (known as PCOR).
- Make health care safer.
- Increase accessibility to health care.
- Improve health care affordability, efficiency, and cost transparency.

Introduction

Health care delivery and patient experience with health care remain significant challenges, even as our Nation's health care system is undergoing complex changes. Patient-centered care has gained renewed focus among health care professionals and patients alike as an essential model for ensuring the quality of patient care. Through its Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) program, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) is advancing patient-centered care by giving patients effective surveys and information to help them make better health care decisions.

The CAHPS surveys of patient experience assess quality of care from the patient point of view in various ambulatory and institutional settings.

AHRQ first launched the CAHPS program in 1995 in response to concerns about the lack of good information about the quality of health plans from the enrollees' perspective. Over time, the program has expanded beyond its original focus on health plans to address a range of health care services and meet the various needs of health care consumers, purchasers, health plans, providers, and policymakers. The goals of the CAHPS program are twofold:

- To develop standardized surveys that organizations can use to collect comparable information on patients' experience with care.
- To generate tools and resources to support the dissemination and use of comparative survey results to inform the public and improve health care quality.

The CAHPS name is a registered trademark of the Federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), which sponsors and funds the development of the surveys as well as related tools and resources. All CAHPS products are in the public domain and available for free. AHRQ's CAHPS program does not mandate the implementation of CAHPS surveys or the collection of data.



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Overview of CAHPS Surveys

CAHPS surveys ask patients to report on their experiences with care. Several surveys ask about experiences with ambulatory care providers such as health plans, physicians' offices, and mental health plans, while others ask about experiences with care delivered in facilities such as hospitals, dialysis centers, and nursing homes. Examples of topics covered by the surveys include the following:

- Communication with health care professionals
- Access to care and information
- Customer service
- Coordination of care

The three most widely used CAHPS surveys are—

- The **CAHPS Health Plan Survey**, which asks enrollees in commercial plans, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Programs (CHIP), and Medicare about their experiences with health plan services and ambulatory care.
- The **CAHPS Clinician & Group Survey (CG-CAHPS)**, which asks patients to report on their experiences with primary or specialty care received from providers and their staff in ambulatory settings.
- The **CAHPS Hospital Survey (HCAHPS)**, which asks patients about the care delivered during an inpatient stay at a hospital facility.

Many of the CAHPS surveys have versions for both adults (18 and over) and children (in which parents report on the experience of a child 17 or younger). To ensure that the surveys reflect the experience of a diverse population, AHRQ requires that all CAHPS surveys be available in both English and Spanish and encourages additional translations.

The Family of CAHPS Surveys

In addition to the Health Plan, Clinician & Group, and Hospital Surveys, other CAHPS surveys include the following:

- **Home Health Care Survey:** Assesses experience with services from Medicare-certified home health agencies that are provided by nurses and therapists, including physical, occupational, and speech-language therapists.
- **In-Center Hemodialysis Survey:** Assesses experience with care from facilities that provide hemodialysis to adults with end-stage renal disease.
- **Nursing Home Survey:** Assesses experience with care delivered in a nursing home to both long-term residents and recently discharged short-stay residents.
- **Surgical Care Survey:** Assesses experience with surgical care delivered by surgeons, their staff, and anesthesiologists before, during, and after surgery.
- **American Indian Survey:** Assesses experience with service and care provided by tribal outpatient clinics or other clinics for the American Indian populations.
- **Dental Plan Survey:** Assesses experience with care provided by dental plans, the dentists, and their staff.
- **Experience of Care and Health Outcomes (ECHO) Survey:** Assesses experience with outpatient mental health or substance abuse services and administration through behavioral health care organizations or managed care plans.

To learn more about the CAHPS surveys, visit <https://cahps.ahrq.gov/surveys-guidance/index.html>.

Development of the CAHPS Surveys

The development process for CAHPS surveys emphasizes scientific rigor and frequent input from patients and other key stakeholders. Major steps include literature reviews and environmental scans, focus groups with patients, input from health care providers and other key stakeholders, cognitive testing of survey questions and reporting measures, and field testing. This process is designed to ensure that the survey will generate valid and reliable data to meet the information needs of health care consumers, care providers, health plans, purchasers, and policymakers.

To achieve the program's goals, AHRQ funds private research organizations with proven expertise in survey design and evaluation, public reporting, and quality assessment and improvement. The current organizations are RAND and the Yale School of Public Health. These research organizations work with AHRQ and other Federal agencies to develop, test, and maintain the surveys

and to produce resources that support and evaluate their use in reports and improvement initiatives. AHRQ also contracts with Westat to support the work of the researchers, assist users of CAHPS products, and manage the CAHPS Database. (For more on the CAHPS database, go to page 5.)

Collectively, these organizations are known as the CAHPS Consortium. To learn more about the CAHPS Consortium and the organizations that have been involved in the different phases of the CAHPS program, visit <https://cahps.ahrq.gov/about-cahps/cahps-program/index.html>.

Uses of CAHPS Surveys Results

Once AHRQ's CAHPS Consortium releases a CAHPS survey into the public domain, it is available for any organization to use for its own purposes. The results of CAHPS surveys are typically used to monitor and drive improvements in patient experience with care and to better inform consumers about health care providers

Principles Guiding CAHPS Survey Development

The development of CAHPS surveys is governed by a set of principles meant to ensure that the surveys are scientifically sound and provide information that is specific, understandable, and actionable. These principles influence survey content and design, survey administration, and issues around the reporting of results. In keeping with these principles, CAHPS surveys—

- Ask about aspects of care for which a patient or enrollee is the best or only source of information.
- Ask about the aspects of care that patients say are most important.
- Ask patients to report on the health care they receive.
- Reflect input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including patients, clinicians, administrators, accrediting bodies and policymakers.
- Build on existing research and available tools.
- Are standardized to ensure that data collection, analyses and reports are consistent across all users of a given survey.

Learn more about the principles at <https://cahps.ahrq.gov/about-cahps/principles/index.html>.





in their area. Some organizations incorporate the survey results into programs that reward or recognize health care providers for providing high-quality care.

Key users of the CAHPS surveys include the following:

- **The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).** For many of the CAHPS surveys, CMS is the organization that sponsors the national implementation of the survey, sets the policies for survey administration, analyzes the data, and publishes the results in private and public reports (including Web sites such as HospitalCompare and PhysicianCompare). In some cases, such as HCAHPS, CMS also uses the survey scores along with other quality measures to help determine payment incentives that reward high-performing health care providers.
- **The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).** NCQA incorporates CAHPS Health Plan Survey results into its accreditation process and its national performance reports. It also uses a version of the Clinician & Group Survey for its Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) Recognition Program.
- **Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Department of Defense (DOD).** The VHA and DOD use versions of the Clinician & Group Survey and HCAHPS to assess patient experience in both military and privately contracted clinics and hospitals across the country.

- **Multistakeholder organizations.** The CG-CAHPS and HCAHPS surveys have become part of the portfolio of performance measures used by local, regional, and State collaborative organizations committed to improving primary, specialty, and inpatient care in their communities.

Finally, the surveys are used by health systems, physician practices, hospitals, and other health care providers to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to help develop strategies for improving patients' experiences with care delivered in their offices and institutions.

Resources for Survey Users

AHRQ provides free support and technical assistance to users of the surveys through the CAHPS User Network and the CAHPS Database.

CAHPS User Network

The CAHPS User Network provides guidance to support users of CAHPS surveys in implementing the instruments, interpreting the results, and using the information to meet their needs. Through the User Network, users of CAHPS survey products and results have access to—

- A Help Line where users can request free technical assistance: 1-800-492-9261 and cahps1@westat.com.
- The CAHPS Web site (cahps.ahrq.gov), which provides comprehensive information on the CAHPS program, each of the surveys, and related products. The site offers—
 - Formatted surveys, administration protocols, and analysis programs.

- Searchable Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).
- Resources to help survey users improve patients' experiences with care, including *The CAHPS Improvement Guide*, case studies, and reports.
- Resources to support the public reporting of survey results and other quality measures, including TalkingQuality—a comprehensive guide to developing consumer reports on quality.
- Podcasts about improving patient experience and reporting to consumers.
- Archived materials from Webcasts and conferences.
- Webcasts with survey experts and experienced users of CAHPS surveys.

The CAHPS Database

The CAHPS Database is a compilation of survey results from a large pool of survey users that enables participants to compare their own results to relevant benchmarks (i.e., reference points such as national and regional averages). It facilitates comparisons of CAHPS survey results by and among survey sponsors and also offers an important source of primary data for research related to patient and consumer assessments of quality as measured by CAHPS surveys.

The CAHPS Database receives data voluntarily submitted by users that have administered either the CAHPS Health Plan Survey or the CAHPS Clinician & Group Survey:

The CAHPS Database is also a key resource for AHRQ's National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports. These annual documents are designed to support policymakers in monitoring the Nation's progress toward improved health care quality. Go to <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdtr/> to access these reports.

- **The CAHPS Health Plan Survey Database** contains data collected since 1998 from over 5.6 million survey responses. These respondents were sampled from enrollees in commercial, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and Medicare Managed Care health plans.
- **The CAHPS Clinician & Group Survey (CG-CAHPS) Database** currently comprises 1.5 million survey responses from over 5,000 medical practices in the United States.

Learn more about AHRQ's CAHPS Database at www.cahpsdatabase.ahrq.gov.

CAHPS Online Reporting System

The CAHPS Online Reporting System is a Web-based platform for viewing Health Plan and Clinician & Group Survey results. The reporting system consists of two major components: a public site and a submitter's site.

- The public site, which is available to anyone, presents a variety of aggregated, de-identified survey results in the form of composite measures, rating items, and other individual survey items,





organized according to survey version and field period. Displays allow users to view top box scores, frequencies, bar charts, and percentiles. The public site also includes a Report Builder feature, which allows users to create and download customized reports.

- The submitter's site is available only to survey users that voluntarily contribute data. These users have access to a secure, password-protected area of the CAHPS Online Reporting System that allows them to compare their own results to selected benchmarks. The submitter's site has all of the

features of the public site, with the added benefit of displaying the health plan or practice site scores that were contributed by the submitting organization.

Research Files

Researchers may submit an application to request access to de-identified research data files from the CAHPS Database to help answer important health services research questions related to patient experience of care. Learn more about research data at <http://cahpsdatabase.ahrq.gov/DataResearchers.aspx>.

To learn more about CAHPS, visit www.cahps.ahrq.gov.

