



**Center for Clinical Standards and Quality/Quality, Safety, and Oversight Group**

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**Ref: QSO 21-06-NH**

**DATE:** December 4, 2020

**TO:** Nursing Home Stakeholders and State Survey Agencies

**FROM:** Director, Quality Safety and Oversight Group

**SUBJECT:** Updates to the Nursing Home Compare website and Five Star Quality Rating System

**Memorandum Summary**

*The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)* is committed to being transparent with the public about changes in publicly reported information related to long term care facilities (i.e., nursing homes) through the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE).

***Changes to the Nursing Home Compare Website and Five Star Quality Rating System:***

- CMS will resume calculating nursing homes Health Inspection and Quality Measure ratings on January 27, 2021.
- CMS is completing its transition to the new [Care Compare website](#).

**Background**

The Nursing Home Compare website and Five Star Quality Rating System have served as valuable resources for consumers to view information about nursing homes to support health care decisions for themselves and/or a loved one. The 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has caused CMS to take a number of actions to help protect nursing home residents. For example, CMS issued an unprecedented array of [temporary regulatory waivers](#) and new rules to equip the American healthcare system with maximum flexibility to respond to the virus. These waivers and rules also impacted the information posted on the Nursing Home Compare website and used in the Five Star Quality Rating System. For example, CMS waived the timeframes that facilities are required to submit resident assessment information through the Minimum Data Set (MDS) per 42 CFR 483.20.<sup>1</sup> Much of this information is used as the underlying data to calculate quality measures that are posted on the Nursing Home Compare website and used in the Five Star Quality Rating System. As a result, CMS announced that quality measures will be held constant by only using data based on a data collection period prior to December 31, 2019 (see [QSO-20-34-NH](#)).

Similarly, on March 23, 2020 ([QSO-20-20-ALL](#)), CMS suspended certain inspections, including standard, fire, and safety inspections, while also implementing a new focused infection control

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/summary-covid-19-emergency-declaration-waivers.pdf>, p.15.

inspection process to concentrate on preventing the spread of COVID-19. CMS began posting the reports and findings from the focused infection control inspections through a link on the Nursing Home Compare website. Since certain inspections were suspended, CMS held the Health Inspection Rating domain of the Five Star Quality Rating System constant (see [QSO-20-28-NH REVISED](#)). This hold impacted updates to other nursing home programs and notifications that are based on nursing home inspections, including the Special Focus Facility program and the Abuse Icon.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, CMS waived the requirement for nursing homes to submit staffing data per 42 CFR 483.70(q), and did not update the Staffing Rating domain of the Five Star Quality Rating System that was scheduled for April 2020.<sup>3</sup> However, due to the importance of staffing and its relationship to quality, CMS ended the waiver to submit staffing data on June 25, 2020. Furthermore, CMS resumed updating the Staffing Rating domain of the Five Star Quality Rating System in October 2020 (see [QSO-20-34-NH](#)). Staffing data will continue to be collected as required, and staffing ratings will continue to be updated quarterly, as scheduled.

Separate from the changes to the Five Star Quality Rating System, on September 3, 2020, [CMS announced](#) the launch of [Care Compare](#), a streamlined redesign of eight existing CMS healthcare compare tools available on [Medicare.gov](#), including Nursing Home Compare. Care Compare provides a single user-friendly interface that patients and caregivers can use to make informed decisions about healthcare based on cost, quality of care, volume of services, and other data.

This memorandum provides updates on the Health Inspection and Quality Measure domains of the Five Star Quality Rating System, and the transition to the new Care Compare website.

## **Updates**

### *Health Inspection Ratings*

Although certain types of inspections were suspended (per QSO-20-20-ALL), CMS has now instructed State Survey Agencies to resume all surveys as soon as they have the resources (e.g., staff and/or Personal Protective Equipment) to do so (see [QSO-20-35-ALL](#)). While the COVID-19 PHE has still hindered States' ability to completely resume all inspections, many states have been able to conduct additional surveys. Additionally, all states have conducted focused infection control surveys in all of the nursing homes in their state.

CMS has always strived to provide updated information about nursing homes' compliance to consumers, families, and residents. Also, we believe it is important for stakeholders to be aware of nursing homes' performance on the focused infection control inspections. Therefore, CMS will resume calculating nursing homes' health inspection ratings on January 27, 2021. Furthermore, findings from the focused infection control inspections will be used to calculate each nursing home's inspection rating. These findings will be included the same way findings from complaint inspections are used in the Five Star Quality Rating System.

### *Quality Measures*

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<sup>2</sup> Special Focus Facility Program: <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Provider-Enrollment-and-Certification/CertificationandCompliance/downloads/sfflist.pdf>. Abuse Icon: <https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/resources/nursing-home/preventing-abuse>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/summary-covid-19-emergency-declaration-waivers.pdf>, p.15.

As previously mentioned, CMS waived the timeframes that facilities are required to submit resident assessment information through the Minimum Data Set (MDS) per 42 CFR 483.20. We note that while the timeframes for submitting data were waived, nursing homes have still been submitting the required data. Since nursing homes have continued to submit MDS data, the data can be used to update quality measures without any issues. We have also analyzed the data used to support the claims-based quality measures, and similarly, see no issues updating these measures. Therefore, the quality measures posted on the Nursing Home Compare website and used in the Five Star Quality Rating System will be updated on January 27, 2021. This action will not only inform residents and families of the current status of residents in nursing homes, but will also incentivize nursing homes to improve performance. As we progress, CMS will analyze the quality measures for any significant changes, and take any actions needed to improve and protect resident health and safety.

To update the quality measures, CMS will use data based on the data collection period ending June 30, 2020. We note that these updates do not apply to quality measures that are part of the [Skilled Nursing Facility Quality Reporting Program \(SNF QRP\)](#).

These actions will also automatically result in updates to the [Special Focus Facility \(SFF\) program](#), including updates to SFF candidates, and facilities' status for receiving an [icon for noncompliance related to abuse](#).

More details will be posted by January 15th, 2021 in the [Five Star Technical Users' Guide](#).

#### *Transition to the new Care Compare website*

As mentioned above, on September 3, 2020, [CMS announced](#) the launch of [Care Compare](#), a streamlined redesign of eight existing CMS healthcare compare tools available on [Medicare.gov](#), including Nursing Home Compare. We are pleased to announce that CMS is completing its transition to the new website. As of December 1, 2020, the legacy Nursing Home Compare website, and the data.medicare.gov website (which houses the underlying data for the Nursing Home Compare website) are no longer available, and users will be redirected to the new websites. Note: There is no change in the information available about nursing homes or the methodology used to calculate ratings. The information is now presented in a more user-friendly format. We're excited to complete this transition and look forward to continuing to enhance the information available to residents, families, and consumers, so they can more easily learn about the quality of care nursing homes provide.

To search for, and view information about nursing homes, please visit <https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/>

To view or download data about nursing homes, please visit <https://data.cms.gov/provider-data/>

#### **Contact:**

Questions about Five Star Quality Rating System should be directed to [BetterCare@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:BetterCare@cms.hhs.gov).

/s/

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