



CAHPS: Assessing Healthcare Quality From the Patient's Perspective

The CAHPS Program

Patient-centered care is well-established as a critical facet of healthcare quality, valued both for its own sake and as a key contributor to other aspects of quality. Through its Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS[®]) program, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has been dedicated to advancing scientific knowledge, measurement, and improvement of patient-centered care since 1995.

AHRQ first launched the CAHPS program in response to concerns about the lack of good information about the quality of health plans from the enrollees' perspective. The program expanded beyond its original focus on health plans to address a range of healthcare services and meet the various needs of healthcare professionals and administrators, consumers, health plans, policymakers, and purchasers.

The current goals of the CAHPS program are to:

- Promote a deeper understanding of patient experience across the spectrum of healthcare delivery.
- Develop standardized surveys that enable healthcare organizations to collect comparable information.
- Support the dissemination and use of comparative survey results to improve healthcare quality and support patients in making informed decisions.

Learn more about the CAHPS program (<https://www.ahrq.gov/cahps/about-cahps/cahps-program/index.html>).

Overview of CAHPS Surveys

The CAHPS surveys assess healthcare quality by asking patients to report on their experiences with care. CAHPS surveys are available for both ambulatory and institutional settings including hospitals, dialysis centers, and nursing homes. Some CAHPS surveys ask about patients' experiences with providers or care for specific health conditions. Other surveys ask enrollees about their experiences with health plans and related programs.

Examples of topics covered by the surveys include the following:

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

Some of the CAHPS surveys have versions for both adults (18 and over) and children (a parent or guardian reports on the experience of a child 17 or younger). Survey users can customize their instruments with supplemental items that address a variety of topics.

Enrollee Experience With Health Plans and Related Programs

- Health Plan Survey
- Home and Community-Based Services Survey

Patient Experience With Providers

- Clinician & Group Survey
- Hospice Survey
- Home Health Care Survey
- Surgical Care Survey

Patient Experience With Condition-Specific Care

- Cancer Care Survey
- Mental Health Care Survey

Patient Experience With Facility-Based Care

- Hospital Survey (HCAHPS)
- Child Hospital Survey
- In-Center Hemodialysis Survey
- Nursing Home Surveys
- Outpatient and Ambulatory Surgery Survey

Finally, CAHPS surveys are available in both English and Spanish; AHRQ encourages the development of additional translations, following CAHPS guidelines.

Learn more about CAHPS surveys and supplemental items (<https://www.ahrq.gov/cahps/surveys-guidance/index.html>).

Development of the CAHPS Surveys

To ensure that all CAHPS surveys are scientifically sound and provide information that is specific, understandable, and actionable, the development of CAHPS surveys is governed by a set of principles that guide content and design, survey administration, and issues around the reporting of results. As part of the process of determining whether new surveys and supplemental items can use the trademarked CAHPS name, AHRQ requires that developers comply with these design principles. Further, any revisions to the survey must follow a development and testing process designed to maintain the quality, comparability, and consistency of CAHPS products over time.

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 healthcare providers and other key stakeholders.
- Cognitive testing of survey questions.
- Cognitive testing of labels for CAHPS measures reported to patients.
- Field testing.

This process is designed to ensure that the survey will generate reliable and valid data to meet the information needs of healthcare consumers, care providers, health plans, purchasers, and policymakers.

To help achieve the program's goals, AHRQ has cooperative agreements with research organizations that have proven expertise in survey design and evaluation, public reporting, and quality assessment and improvement. The current organizations are the RAND Corporation and the Yale University 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.

AHRQ also contracts with Westat to support the work of the researchers, assist users of CAHPS products, and manage the CAHPS Database. Collectively, these organizations and the AHRQ CAHPS program staff are known as the CAHPS Consortium.

Uses of CAHPS Survey Results

Once the CAHPS Consortium releases a CAHPS survey into the public domain, it is available free of charge for any organization to use for its own purposes. CAHPS survey findings are used to monitor and drive improvements in patient experience with care and better inform consumers about healthcare providers in their area.

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 websites 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 performers.
- **The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).** NCQA incorporates CAHPS Health Plan Survey results into its accreditation process and its national performance reports.
- **Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Department of Defense (DOD).** The VHA and DOD use the CAHPS Clinician & Group Survey and HCAHPS to assess patient experience in both military and privately contracted clinics and hospitals across the country.

CAHPS Survey Design Principles

- CAHPS questions focus on aspects of care for which the patient is the best or only source of information. For example, only a patient can tell whether a doctor communicated in a way the patient could understand or whether the patient felt treated with respect.
- CAHPS questions are understood and interpreted consistently by a range of consumers.
- CAHPS questions ask patients to report on only care they have experienced and/or can observe.
- CAHPS questions ask about aspects of healthcare delivery that are important to patients.
- CAHPS questions are consistent with existing standards of healthcare delivery.
- CAHPS reporting questions provide an explicit time frame (e.g., in the past six months) or event reference (e.g., during your hospitalization).
- CAHPS questions include an explicit reference to the clinician, organization, or facility that is the focus of the survey.
- CAHPS surveys consist of a core set of questions that are administered to all respondents in a standardized manner.
- CAHPS surveys are suitable for comparisons across heterogeneous populations.
- CAHPS surveys can be self-administered.

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

CAHPS Resources for Survey Users

AHRQ provides free support and technical assistance 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. Resources include:

- A Help Line where users can request free technical assistance: 1-800-492-9261 and cahps1@westat.com.
- The CAHPS website (<https://www.ahrq.gov/cahps/index.html>), which provides comprehensive information on the CAHPS program, each of the surveys, and related products.

What's Available on the AHRQ CAHPS Website?

- Descriptions of CAHPS surveys
- Formatted surveys, evidence-based guidance on survey administration methods, and analysis programs
- Resources to help survey users improve patients' experiences with care, including The CAHPS Ambulatory Care Improvement Guide, case studies, and reports
- Webcasts with CAHPS survey experts and experienced users
- Podcasts about improving patient experience and reporting to consumers
- Archived materials from conferences
- Searchable bibliography of CAHPS publications
- Frequently Asked Questions

The CAHPS Database

The CAHPS Database compiles survey results from a large pool of survey users to enable participants to compare their own results to relevant comparators, such as national and regional averages. The Database facilitates comparison of CAHPS survey results for quality improvement and offers an important source of primary data for research related to assessments of patient and consumer experience with care.

The CAHPS Database currently receives data voluntarily submitted by users that have administered the CAHPS Health Plan Survey 5.0 and the CAHPS Clinician & Group Survey 3.0:

- **The CAHPS Health Plan Survey Database** contains data collected from over 7.3 million survey responses. These respondents were sampled from enrollees in commercial, Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Program and Medicare Managed Care health plans.
- **The CAHPS Clinician & Group Survey Database** currently comprises 3.8 million adult survey responses from over 8,000 medical practices in the United States.
- **The CAHPS Home and Community-Based Services Survey Database** operational in early 2020, contains data submitted by State Medicaid agencies and the managed care entities with which they contract.

Aggregated survey results are available through annual Chartbooks and an online reporting system. Organizations that submit their data may request a private, customized Excel feedback report that compares their own survey results to overall results.

Researchers may submit an application to request access to deidentified research data files from the CAHPS Database to help answer important health services research questions related to patient experience of care.

Learn more about AHRQ’s CAHPS Database and requesting research datasets (<https://www.ahrq.gov/cahps/cahps-database/index.html>).

