



# NHPCO Guidelines for Selecting a CAHPS® Hospice Survey Vendor

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## Introduction

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has developed the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) Hospice Survey to measure and assess the experiences of patients who died while receiving hospice care, as well as the experiences of their informal primary caregivers. Starting in 2015, CMS requires hospices to participate in the new CAHPS® Hospice Survey.

As part of the process, and to ensure that survey data are unbiased, hospices are required to contract with a third-party vendor that has been approved by CMS and has gone through CMS training in collecting and submitting CAHPS® survey data. In September of 2014 CMS released a list of vendors that meet the CAHPS® Hospice Survey requirements and that are conditionally approved to administer the CAHPS® Hospice Survey. The list can be accessed on the CMS CAHPS® Hospice Survey [website](#).

NHPCO will not be a vendor for the CAHPS® Hospice Survey and does not endorse or promote any vendor's services related to the CAHPS® Hospice. However, because of our longstanding experience and expertise in performance measurement, NHPCO recognizes the importance of accurate and meaningful quality measure results based on sound methodological principles. Subsequently, we want hospice providers to make an informed choice when selecting their CAHPS® Hospice Survey vendor.

Both CMS and NHPCO recommend that hospices talk to multiple CAHPS® Hospice Survey vendors and carefully evaluate their services before making a final choice. NHPCO has created the following set of questions to provide hospices with unbiased guidance to use to navigate through the sea of CAHPS® Hospice promotional marketing information.

# Questions to Ask CAHPS® Hospice Survey Vendors

## 1) What experience does your company have administering CAHPS® surveys?

- CAHPS® surveys are in use in many healthcare settings. Successful experience with administration and data submission for current CAHPS® surveys is an important predictor of future success with the CAHPS® Hospice Survey.
- Experience with administering the Family Evaluation of Hospice Care (FEHC) survey is not necessarily an indicator that a vendor is better able to administer the CAHPS® Hospice Survey or to provide results that are useful for performance improvement.

## 2) How will my organization's CAHPS® Hospice Survey results be provided?

- To be of maximum utility, results should be presented alongside meaningful comparative data that allow hospices to identify and target areas for improvement.
- Consider how well a vendor's proposed presentation of results fits with your current QAPI program. Decide what product or service suits your needs rather than molding your approach to performance improvement to match a vendor's report.

## 3) How often will my results be provided?

- CAHPS® Hospice Survey results should be provided often enough to be usable for evaluating effectiveness of performance improvement projects. But, too frequent reporting may not yield an accurate picture of performance.
- The usability of your results is dependent upon how many surveys are being returned during the reporting timeframe. The smaller the number of surveys the more influence any single response will have on the score for a measure. And, even a substantial number of surveys may not adequately represent the patient/caregiver population of a large hospice.
- Having very frequent or "real time" reports may sound appealing, but may not be useful if the number of surveys included in the report is so small that the results vary greatly from report to report or represent only a very small proportion of your total surveys. There is little value in having very frequent reports if a sufficient number of surveys is not included in the reporting period to truly reflect performance on a measure.
- In addition, it will take time before enough CAHPS® Hospice Survey results are available to see real trends in performance on the measures. Be wary of making changes in practice based on initial CAHPS® Hospice Survey results.

## 4) How will comments from CAHPS® Hospice Survey respondents be handled?

- Respondent comments can be very informative in identifying issues that need to be addressed. Comments, especially similar negative comments from multiple respondents, can reveal problems that may be the underlying cause of poor quality measure scores.

- CAHPS® Hospice survey respondent comments should be routinely provided so that any serious issue that warrants immediate attention can be addressed as swiftly as needed.
- Hospices, not vendors, should determine which comments require action, when that action should occur, and what action should be taken.

**5) How will requests for adding questions (e.g., Veteran specific questions from the FEHC-V survey) to the CAHPS® Hospice Survey be accommodated?**

- CMS allows up to 15 questions to be added to the CAHPS® Hospice Survey.
- Hospices should have a thorough understanding of how a vendor will accommodate requests for adding questions. Hospices should ask for detailed information related to things such as placement of additional questions on the survey, reporting of results for additional questions, and additional costs.

**6) What services are available related to support for performance improvement?**

- A singular focus on attaining higher scores should not be the primary goal of performance measurement. An understanding of both performance measurement and the ability to explain the relationship between measure results and clinical practice is required to provide hospices with practical and effective support for performance improvement.
- A CAHPS® Hospice Survey vendor that offers a service line that includes assistance with interpretation of results should have expertise in accepted quality improvement methodology and demonstrated proficiency in its application. Hospices should question vendors about their qualifications to provide services beyond the CMS requirements for survey administration and data submission.

**7) Can FEHC scores be used to predict performance on the CAHPS® Hospice Survey measures?**

- This is a trick question. There is no evidence that FEHC scores are related to CAHPS® Hospice scores and any assertions of comparability are erroneous and misleading.
- There are similarities in wording between some FEHC and CAHPS® Hospice Survey questions. But, differences in the order of the questions and the wording of the response options mean that the two surveys are not comparable.
- Also, CMS has not yet released the scoring methodology for the CAHPS® Hospice Survey. Until CMS provides more information on scoring, assessment of an association of scores for FEHC and CAHPS® Hospice Survey questions is not possible.

**8) How can I know my hospice is getting the best value for Hospice CAHPS® Survey administration and data submission?**

- The most important thing you can do to ensure that you're receiving the best value is to compare information from multiple vendors. Utilize this list of questions to compare vendors' ability to provide you with services and products that both meet the regulatory requirements and allow you to meaningfully examine the quality of care your hospice provides.