

Learn how hospices can avoid the 3 major ADE categories impacting patient safety & drug spend >>>  [DOWNLOAD EBOOK](#)

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**TOP STORIES**

**Make the Most of Membership – Updated Communication Preferences**

We're making your NHPCO member experience even better! The NHPCO team has refreshed the Communication Preferences feature to ensure you receive the latest and greatest from NHPCO on the topics you're interested in directly to your inbox. You can now customize your experience and choose which categories of communications you'd like to receive by [logging in to your NHPCO account](#), selecting 'View My Profile,' and navigating to '[My Communication Preferences](#).'



**CMS Releases FY 2025 Hospice Wage Index and Payment Rate Update Proposed Rule**

On March 28, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released the [fiscal year \(FY\) 2025 Hospice Wage Index and Payment Rate Update](#) proposed rule, which includes:

- A 2.6% rate increase
- A hospice cap amount of \$34,364.85
- Changes to wage index statistical areas
- Proposals for the Hospice Outcomes and Patient Evaluation (HOPE) instrument
- Updates to the CAHPS® Hospice Survey and quality measures
- Clarifications to the hospice Conditions of Participation
- Two requests for information

NHPCO issued a [statement](#) in response to the rule late last week, and an analysis of the proposed rule in the April 2 [regulatory alert](#). On **April 25, 2-3 p.m. ET**, NHPCO will also host a [webinar](#) on the proposed rule.

The Regulatory and Compliance team has begun preparing formal comments in coordination with the NHPCO Regulatory Committee and national hospice stakeholder organizations. Thoughts, input, and suggestions are welcomed during this process. Stay tuned in NewsBriefs for additional details as we gather information to include in the NHPCO comments, due on **May 28, 2024**.

**OMB Updates Federal Race and Ethnicity Standards**

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has implemented comprehensive revisions to its standards for race and ethnicity classification, adopting several recommendations from NHPCO's [comment letter](#). Key updates include:

- Providing a single question for race and ethnicity and permitting multiple responses

- Adding a separate Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) category as a minimum reporting category
- Mandating more detailed data collection unless an exemption is granted by OMB due to potential burdens or privacy concerns
- Modernizing terminology
- Requiring federal agencies to develop Action Plans on Race and Ethnicity Data

These adjustments aim to ensure uniformity and comparability of race and ethnicity data across federal agencies immediately, with complete compliance mandated within five years (by March 28, 2029). Federal agencies are directed to update their surveys and forms as soon as possible, with a public compliance plan due within 18 months. This represents a significant shift, as previous OMB guidance on race and ethnicity data collection has remained significantly unchanged since the issuance of SPD15 in 1977. For more details, review the [updated directive](#) and [press release](#).

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**April 9:** [Regulatory and Quality Office Hours](#)

**April 9:** Development/PR/Marketing Chat: [Communicating Quality: How To Frame, Build, Communicate, and Evolve Your Quality Story](#)

**April 10:** Spiritual Caregiver Chat: [Exploring the Four Domains of Spiritual Health & Well-Being](#)

**April 11:** We Honor Veterans [Partner Networking Call](#)

**April 11:** Project ECHO Dementia Care Miniseries: [Best Practices and Beyond](#)

**April 12:** [Membership Orientation Call](#)

**April 12:** [Palliative Care Office Hours](#)

**April 15 – 17:** [2024 NHPCO Virtual Interdisciplinary Conference: Focusing on Opportunities and Challenges on the Front Lines\\*](#)

**April 18:** [We Honor Veterans Office Hours](#)

**April 18:** Project ECHO Dementia Care Miniseries: [Best Practices and Beyond](#)

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## REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE

### Hospice PEPPER Distribution Delayed Through Fall 2024

There remains a temporary pause for the distribution of comparative billing reports (CBRs) and Program for Evaluating Payment Patterns Electronic Reports (PEPPERs) through the fall of 2024. This means hospices will not be able to access their PEPPERs in April 2024. CMS has indicated the agency will release a Request for Information (RFI) in the coming months to improve the quality and accessibility of these reports. Reach out to [CBRPEPPERInquiries@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:CBRPEPPERInquiries@cms.hhs.gov) with any questions.

### CMS Updates Ordering and Referring Data File to Include Hospices

Beginning May 1, 2024, physicians must be enrolled in or validly opted out of Medicare in order to certify a patient's terminal illness under the Medicare hospice benefit. CMS has indicated hospices should refer to the [Ordering and Referring Data File \(ORDF\)](#) to determine a physician's Medicare enrollment or opt-out status. The ORDF has been updated to include a column for hospices, similar to existing columns for DMEPOS and HHAs. NHPCO strongly encourages hospice providers to engage with physician partners now to ensure services are covered beginning May 1. Any questions can be directed to [regulatory@nhpco.org](mailto:regulatory@nhpco.org).

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## QUALITY

### Open Door Forum

CMS held a Home Health, Hospice, and DME Open Door Forum (ODF) on Wednesday, April 3 and provided updates on the HOPE Tool, CAHPS survey, and other elements of the HQRP impacted

by the FY2025 Hospice Proposed Rule. A recording and transcript of the ODF will be posted at [CMS Open Door Forum Podcasts and Transcripts](#). Members are encouraged to sign up for the [CMS ODF Mailing List](#) to receive future ODF communications.

### **Quality Connections**

**End of First Quarter:** The first quarter of the Quality Connections (QC) 2024 program year ended on March 31, 2024. All activities completed through that date will be included in the year-end Achievement Map update in mid-April. Organizations that have earned rings or completed the program will receive an achievement logo to add to their online and print collateral, demonstrating their commitment to quality improvement.

**QC Evaluation Surveys:** QC participants are asked to complete the Pre- and Post-Assessment surveys located on their dashboard landing page. These evaluations provide important information in planning future Quality Connections offerings.

**About QC:** Quality Connections is NHPCO's core program for continuous quality improvement for hospice providers and professionals. Visit the [Quality Connections page](#) or reach out to [qualityconnections@nhpco.org](mailto:qualityconnections@nhpco.org) to learn more.

### **Measures of Excellence (MOE) Walkthrough**

NHPCO hosted a [Measures of Excellence](#) walkthrough on Wednesday, April 3. This session focused on key aspects of the MOE, including an overview of the data set collection and submission processes, how to leverage the dashboard, and how to analyze your data. Members are encouraged to [view the recording](#) or reach out to [moe@nhpco.org](mailto:moe@nhpco.org) with questions.

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## **PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT**

### **NHPCO Webinar Miniseries | Quality and Regulatory**

Join faculty for a six-part webinar series on regulatory, compliance, and quality considerations in hospice care. Each webinar will be from 2 to 3 p.m. ET.

1. April 25: [FY 2025 Hospice Wage Index and Quality Reporting Proposed Rule](#)
2. June 27: [Quality Data and Surveys](#)
3. August 15: [FY 2025 Hospice Wage Index Final Rule and CY 2025 Home Health Proposed Rule](#)
4. November 21: [CY 2025 Home Health Final Rule](#)

[View details on the series, webinar descriptions, learning outcomes, and faculty.](#)

### **Updated CE/CME Opportunities**

NHPCO experts and advisors reviewed and revamped many [online learning](#) offerings this year, including signature programs and online enduring materials. Explore the [full catalog](#) to learn more or check out the courses below for the latest hospice regulations and standards:

- [Hospice Quality Certificate Program \(HQCP\)](#): This program reviews the federal hospice regulations, compliance as the foundation of a quality hospice program, and the connection between compliance and quality outcomes.
- [Hospice Compliance Certificate Program \(HCCP\)](#): This program covers the basics of healthcare compliance, including developing a compliance program, compliance risk assessment, compliance policies and procedures, and anonymous reporting.
- [Hospice Conditions of Participation](#): This module reviews hospice levels of care and presents application scenarios for participants. The module discusses the provision of hospice care in nursing facilities, a regulatory "hot spot" for providers today.

If you've already completed HQCP or HCCP, check out the recently updated [companion courses](#). To enroll in NHPCO's courses, visit the [Online Catalog](#).

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## MEMBER UPDATES

### Now Is the Time to Nominate Your Star Volunteers!

The [Volunteers Are the Foundation of Hospice Awards](#) nomination period is open until April 30. Don't forget to submit your star volunteers. Award categories include Patient/Family Service, Organizational Support, Specialized Volunteer Service, Young Leader, and We Honor Veterans Service. Visit [Volunteers Are the Foundation of Hospice Awards](#) to get started.

### Membership Orientation Call

Whether you're new to NHPCO or need a refresher, we're glad you're here. Join NHPCO's monthly membership orientation calls on the second Friday of the month from 2 to 3 p.m. ET to connect, exchange valuable insights, and maximize the benefits of the NHPCO membership. Your membership matters to us, and we're committed to supporting you every step of the way.

[Register for the April 12 orientation call.](#)

### Make the Most of Your Membership

Sign up for NHPCO's [Monthly Membership Tips](#) today! Learn about the latest offerings and any hidden gems you may have missed.

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## WE HONOR VETERANS

### We Honor Veterans Partner Networking Call

Join us for the first We Honor Veterans (WHV) Partner Networking Call of 2024 on April 11 at 4 p.m. ET! Attendees will be updated with the most recent news from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), NHPCO, and WHV partners. We look forward to welcoming [Dream Foundation](#) to discuss Dreams for Veterans, a recipient of the prestigious 2023 Fisher Service Award. We will also be joined by a VA representative who will review and provide updates on available VA benefits and services. [Register now](#) and join us as we come together to ensure our veterans receive the care and recognition they deserve.

### We Honor Veterans Office Hours

Join the WHV team for Office Hours on Thursday, April 18, 12-12:30 p.m. ET. WHV participants of all levels are welcome to bring questions regarding level reports, website support, and more. [Sign up today!](#) Stay updated on all of the events hosted by our WHV partners via the [Events Calendar](#).

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## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

### New Think Cultural Health Newsletter

The [Think Cultural Health \(TCH\)](#) newsletter raises awareness of culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) in health and healthcare. The March edition highlights TCH's new e-learning program for nurses, CLAS efforts at a healthcare system in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and HHS's updated Language Access Plan.

### Butler-Williams Scholars Program

This program at the [National Institute on Aging](#) provides emerging researchers with unique opportunities to gain insight into aging research. The program offers a variety of perspectives and includes presentations, seminars, and interactive small-group activities and discussions. The summer program will cover research topics including the biology of aging; genetics and Alzheimer's disease; health, behavior, and aging; and health disparities research related to aging. If interested, the deadline to apply is April 19.

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## MyNHPCO COMMUNITIES

### Upcoming Chats Not to Miss

As a member of NHPCO, you have free access to specialized chats with peers from across the country through the [MyNHPCO Communities](#), including:

- **[Communicating Quality: How To Frame, Build, Communicate and Evolve Your Quality Story](#)** - Register for the Development/PR/Marketing Community chat on April 9, 1-2 p.m. ET to hear from [Kim Skehan](#), CHAP VP of Accreditation, as she shares advice and best practices for building and evolving your quality story. Research shows that perceptions of care quality are the greatest factors impacting the willingness of a patient or family to accept care from an agency.
- **[Exploring the Four Domains of Spiritual Health and Wellbeing](#)** - Researchers and clinicians developed four domains of spiritual wellbeing that can be significant factors in peaceful life closure for patients in hospice care. Join the MyNHPCO Spiritual Caregiver Community chat on Wednesday, April 10, 3-4 p.m. ET, as we explore these four domains together.

### Chat Recordings Now Available

MyNHPCO Community chats are recorded and posted for your convenience. Here are the recent chat recordings now available:

- **Workforce Chat Recording** - [Developing Highly Functioning Teams: Using Interpersonal Skills to Create a Cohesive and Productive Team](#)
- **Integrative & Rehabilitation Therapies Chat Recording** - [Assessing and Working with Spiritual Needs in Hospice Music Therapy](#)

The full [chat schedule](#) is available on MyNHPCO. You must be logged in to access details on MyNHPCO Chats. Please also note that to view some chat recordings, you may have to join the appropriate MyNHPCO community. Chats are a unique opportunity for professional communities to learn together; continuing education credits are not available.

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*NewsBriefs* is a weekly publication provided to members of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.  
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