



Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Tip Guide

Strategies and suggestions for having conversations with your patients about their health



Provider Communications

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Strategies and suggestions for having conversations with your patients about their health

What is the Health Outcomes Survey (HOS)?

- **An annual survey administered from late July to November to a random sample of Medicare Advantage patients.** The same patients are surveyed again two years later to assess changes in physical and mental health status.
- **A measurement of patients' perception of their physical and mental health and overall quality of life.**
- **Survey results impact the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Star Ratings.**

How can you help?

Each HOS Star measure addresses a different aspect of patient care and patient-provider interaction. Provider interactions with their patients have a direct impact on the rating of HOS measures. The following table displays the five HOS measures included in the annual Medicare Star ratings with some tips to improve performance. Increased awareness of these measures can help guide discussions of these topics with patients.



HOS Star Measures

Fall Risk Management

The percentage of patients with problems walking or balancing who discussed it with their doctor and received treatment during the past year.



Strategies/suggestions	Sample HOS survey questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess patients for balance problems, recent falls, difficulty walking and other fall risks. Recommend routine eye exams and hearing tests. Review medications for any issues that increase fall risk. Suggest exercises to improve muscle strength and balance. Perform bone density screening, especially for high-risk members. Discuss home safety tips, such as removing trip hazards, installing handrails, and using non-slip mats and night lights. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Have you fallen in the past 12 months?</i> <i>In the past 12 months, have you had problems with balance or walking?</i> <i>In the past 12 months, have you talked with your doctor or other health care provider about falling or problems with balance or walking?</i> <i>Has your doctor or other health care provider done anything to help prevent falls or treat problems with balance or walking?</i>

Best practices

- Suggest patients use a cane or a walker when needed.
- Promote available patient benefits/programs for physical activity. Look for muscle strength and balance programs.
- Check the patient's blood pressure while the patient is standing, sitting and reclining.
- Schedule or complete a vision and hearing test for patient.

Physical Activity in Older Adults

The percentage of patients who discussed exercise with their doctor and were advised to start, increase or maintain their physical activity during the year.

Strategies/suggestions	Sample HOS survey questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk about the importance of physical activity and the benefits of staying active. Assess patients' current level of physical ability and develop a plan with members to start or increase physical activity. Refer patients with limited mobility to physical therapy to learn safe and effective exercises. Provide educational materials, safe exercises, and community resources to improve physical activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>In the past 12 months, have you talked with a doctor or other health care provider about your level of exercise or physical activity?</i> <i>In the past 12 months, has a doctor or other health care provider advised you to start, increase or maintain your level of exercise or physical activity?</i>

Best practices

- Ask patients if they exercise regularly or do any type of physical activity.
- Ask patients if they know how to start, increase or maintain physical activity.
- Encourage patients to **begin** taking the stairs, **increase** walking from 10 to 20 minutes every day, or **continue** a physical movement program.
- Promote available patient benefits/programs for physical activity. Patients can call the number on the back of their ID card.
- Promote web-based programs (i.e., fitonhealth.com), which provides access to various fitness experiences in person and online.



Improving or Maintaining Physical Health

The percentage of patients whose physical health was the same or better than expected after two years.



Best practices

- Ask patients questions about their overall physical well-being, functional status, pain and if their health limits them in performing daily activities (such as climbing stairs, working, etc.).
- Partner with your patients to set physical health improvement goals (like healthy eating or exercise habits).
- Promote available patient benefits/programs to improve physical health and well-being. Patients can call the number on the back of their ID card.
- Promote web-based programs (i.e., [fitonhealth.com](https://www.fitonhealth.com)), which provides access to various fitness experiences in person and online.

Strategies/suggestions	Sample HOS survey questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess pain and functional status using standardized tools at least annually. • Provide interventions to improve physical health, such as disease management, pain management or physical therapy. • Promote self-management support strategies, such as goal setting, action planning, problem solving and follow up to help patients take an active role in improving their health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In general, how would you rate your health?</i> • <i>Does your health now limit you in these activities?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Moderate activities like vacuuming or bowling?</i> – <i>Climbing several flights of stairs?</i> • <i>During the past four weeks, have you had any of the following problems with your work or other regular daily activities as a result of your physical health?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Accomplished less than you would like?</i> – <i>Were limited in the kind of work or other activities you were able to perform?</i> • <i>During the past four weeks, how much did pain interfere with your normal work?</i>

Management of Urinary Incontinence in Older Adults

The percentage of patients with a urine leakage problem who discussed the problem with their doctor and received treatment within six months. *A lower rate indicates better performance.



Best practices

- Ask patients if bladder control is a problem.
- If so, ask does it interfere with the patient's sleep or daily activities.
- Provide bladder control education and potential treatment options for bladder control issues that may arise as the member ages.

Strategies/suggestions	Sample HOS survey questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask patients if they have had any bladder control issues or urinary leakage.• Discuss ways to decrease the risk of bladder control issues, including pelvic floor exercises, avoiding bladder irritants and maintaining a healthy weight.• Discuss treatments for bladder control issues that may arise with age, such as behavioral therapy, exercises, medications, medical devices and surgery.• Provide educational brochures and materials as conversation starters for this sensitive subject.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>In the past six months, have you experienced leaking of urine?</i>• <i>Have you ever talked with a doctor, nurse or other health care provider about leaking of urine?</i>• <i>During the past six months, how much did leaking of urine make you change your daily activities or interfere with your sleep?</i>• <i>There are many ways to control or manage the leaking of urine, including bladder training exercises, medication and surgery. Have you ever talked with a doctor, nurse or other health care provider about any of these approaches?</i>



Improving or Maintaining Mental Health

The percentage of patients whose mental health was the same or better than expected after two years.



Strategies/suggestions	Sample HOS survey questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess your patients' symptoms of depression with appropriate screening tools.• Refer patients to mental health services or manage depression and anxiety treatment as indicated.• Use motivational interviewing to improve treatment, engagement, and mental and physical health outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>How much time during the past four weeks:</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">– <i>Have you felt calm or peaceful?</i>– <i>Did you have a lot of energy?</i>– <i>Have you felt downhearted and blue?</i>• <i>During the past four weeks, how much of the time has your physical health or emotional problems interfered with your social activities (like visiting with friends, relatives, etc.)?</i>• <i>Compared to one year ago, how would you rate your emotional problems in general? (such as feeling anxious, depressed, irritable)? Low?</i>• <i>Have you recently visited the hospital, emergency department or urgent care? If so, why?</i>

Best practices

- Promote available patient benefits/programs for mental health; refer members to a behavioral health resource. Patients can call the number on the back of their ID card and follow the prompts for behavioral health.
- Promote web-based programs (i.e., mystrength.com, which provides evidence-based behavioral health self-care resources.)
- Consider using depression screening tools like the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) to identify early signs of depression.
- Ask open ended questions to assess if a patient's mental health affects daily activities.

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