

How to Improve CAHPS® Results and Enhance the Patient Experience

A Provider Guide





Table of Contents

Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) ¹ Overview	1
Importance of Patient Experience	2
Patient Access Measures	3
Getting needed care	3
Getting appointments and care quickly	4
Care coordination	4
Provider and Office Staff Communication Measure	5
How well doctors communicate	5
Rating of health care quality	6
Rating of personal doctor	6
Annual Flu Vaccine	7
Resources	8



Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS)¹ Overview

The CAHPS health plan survey is a standardized tool developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The survey tool measures members' experiences with their health plans and health care services. It focuses on key aspects such as:

- Ease of accessing care.
- Communication with doctors.
- Customer service from the health plans.
- Getting needed care and services.
- Overall satisfaction with the health plan.

The results help health plans identify areas for improvement, and support accreditation and regulatory reporting. They also help guide consumers in making informed health decisions.

Every year, a random sample of health plan members receive this 60 question survey between February and May. Responses are anonymous.

Pre-notification	February
Mailed surveys and reminders	February-April
Phone collection	Late April-May
Data collection	May
Initial CAHPS results	June
Final CAHPS results	July-August

Health plans cannot:

- Ask custom questions.
- Go into detail on member characteristics.
- Explore the details of member issues and concerns.

CAHPS surveys give members the opportunity to share their view on the aspects of care that matter most to them. As a health plan, we are committed to working alongside our provider partners to deliver an exceptional member experience. And as a provider, you play a central role in shaping that experience. That is why it is important for you to understand how your patients/our members evaluate the care they receive. We encourage you to take a moment to review and become familiar with some of the key measures/components included in the survey.



¹CAHPS® is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).



Importance of Patient Experience

Patient experience is an important measure in the health care industry. A positive patient experience has been shown to improve important clinical outcomes, including prevention and disease management.



Any interaction can have the potential to change patient experience and their perceived access to care. Everyone plays an integral role to help positive patient experience, including the:

- Physician or provider
- Call center
- Front office staff
- Charge nurse
- Case coordinator

Use this guide to help you achieve a strong CAHPS performance

This guide gives examples of survey questions. It also provides recommendations and best practices to drive your discussion on key CAHPS topics with patients during their office visit.

This guide highlights the **CAHPS measures** most influenced by providers and clinic staff during patient visits.

Impacted by providers

- ✓ Getting needed care.
- ✓ Getting appointments and care quickly.
- ✓ Care coordination.
- ✓ How well doctors communicate.
- ✓ Rating of health care quality.
- ✓ Rating of personal doctor.
- ✓ Annual flu vaccine.

²National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), Department of Health Care Services (DHCS)



Patient Access Measures

Getting needed care

This CAHPS measure assesses the ease with which patients received their care, tests or treatment. It also assesses how often patients were able to get specialist appointments scheduled when needed.

Time frame	CAHPS survey questions	Recommendations and best practices
In the last 6 months...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How often were you able to get an appointment to see a specialist as soon as you needed it?• How often was it easy to get the care, tests or treatment you needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer help to patients, who need appointments with specialists, as soon as possible.• Let patients know office hours (and after hours) if there is a provider on call.• Offer appointments or refills via text or email; send refills directly to patient's pharmacy of choice.• Offer telehealth visits versus in-person visits if appropriate.• Review, monitor and audit prior authorization and referral practices, and evaluate how decisions are communicated to the patient.• Help patients schedule appointments with:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Primary care physician (PCP):<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Urgent: Same day/within 48 hours.» Routine: Within 10 business days.– Specialist:<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Urgent: Within 96 hours.» Routine: Within 15 days.

(continued)

Getting appointments and care quickly

This CAHPS measure assesses how often patients were able to get the care they needed as soon as they needed it.

Time frame	CAHPS survey questions	Recommendations and best practices
In the last 6 months...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When you needed care right away, how often did you get care as soon as you needed it? How often did you get an appointment for a check-up or routine care as soon as you needed it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that a few appointments in the morning and afternoon each day are available to accommodate urgent visits. Offer appointments with a nurse practitioner or physician assistant for short-notice appointments. Encourage patients to schedule their annual wellness visit each year (at the beginning of the year) and their follow-up visit as soon as possible (in advance). Keep patients informed if there is a wait longer than 15 minutes and give them the opportunity to reschedule. Offer telehealth visits versus in-person visits if appropriate.

Care coordination

This CAHPS measure assesses providers' assistance with managing the health care system. This includes access to medical records, timely follow-up on test results and education on prescription medications.

Time frame	CAHPS survey questions	Recommendations and best practices
In the last 6 months...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How often did your doctor have your medical records or other information about your care? How often did someone from your personal doctor's office follow up to give you test results? How often did you get those test results (blood test, X-ray or other tests) as soon as you needed them? How often did you and your personal doctor talk about all the prescription medicines you were taking? Did you get the help you needed from your personal doctor's office to manage your care among these different providers and services? How often did your personal doctor seem informed and up to date about the care you got from specialists? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that there are open appointments for patients recently discharged from a facility. Have a medication list and medical history, including appointments with specialists, at hand to review during patient office visits. Ask patients if they have seen any other providers. If you are aware that specialty care has occurred, please mention it and discuss as needed. Encourage patients to bring their medications to each visit. Link patients to community resources. Ensure patients are called about test results and/or any delays. Monitor prior authorization and referral practices.



Provider and Office Staff Communication Measure

How well doctors communicate

This CAHPS measure assesses patients' experience on the quality of communication they receive with their doctor. Consider using the teach-back method when communicating health information with patients. This is a technique for health care providers to ensure that they have explained medical information clearly so patients and their families understand what is communicated to them.

Time frame	CAHPS survey questions	Recommendations and best practices
In the last 6 months...	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How often did your personal doctor explain things in a way that was easy to understand?• How often did your personal doctor listen carefully to you?• How often did your personal doctor show respect for what you had to say?• How often did your personal doctor spend enough time with you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure patients feel respected by providers and office staff:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Listen to patient and express understanding.– Ask if all questions have been addressed.– Thank the patient for waiting, if appropriate.– Include patient in next steps and decision making.• Meet patients' language needs by:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Using translation and interpreter services.– Using alternate format resources.– Speaking in plain, simple language.• Establish a way to check for understanding and, if needed, re-explain. Ask the patient (or family member) to explain in their own words what they need to know or do.• Provide sensitivity training to staff on how to handle sensitive situations.• Establish a research-based health literacy intervention that improves patient-provider communication and patient health outcomes.<ul style="list-style-type: none">– For information about the teach-back method, visit the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality at bit.ly/AHRQTeach-Back.• Treat patients with empathy and respect. Make eye contact, listen carefully and express understanding.

Rating of health care quality

The CAHPS survey asks patients to rate the overall quality of their health care on a 0-10 scale.

Incorporate the following into your daily practice:

- ✓ Encourage patients to make their routine appointments for checkups or follow-up visits as soon as they can — weeks or even months in advance.
- ✓ Ensure that open care gaps are addressed during each patient visit.
- ✓ Make use of the provider portal at **provider.wellcare.com** when requesting prior authorizations.

Rating of personal doctor

The CAHPS survey asks patients to rate their personal doctor on a 0-10 scale.

Incorporate the following into your daily practice:

- ✓ Maintain eye contact with the patient and avoid interrupting while the patient is speaking.
- ✓ Speak to the patient clearly using language that is easy to understand.
- ✓ Be respectful toward your patient and allow them time to express their concerns.
- ✓ Ask how the medical issue/illness is affecting the patient's day-to-day life.
- ✓ Review goals for treatment and explore any barriers to the patient's compliance with treatment, medications and follow-up.





Annual Flu Vaccine

Getting a flu shot will often protect patients from getting a serious case of the flu.³ Vaccination may not always prevent infection but it can make symptoms less severe. It can also reduce the risk of patient hospitalization. Here are a few clinical strategies that can be used during flu season:

Empower staff	Enhance clinical workflow
<p>Designate a “flu lead” to plan and implement these strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Identify strategies that can be easily used in your clinic or practice.✓ Assign tasks to each employee.✓ Develop a plan to implement more strategies over time. <p>Train all staff to communicate about the flu vaccine in the same way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Use the “presumptive approach” to set the tone that getting a flu vaccine is routine.✓ Assume that patients will get vaccinated.✓ Discuss sick visits as an opportunity to immunize and under what circumstances patients should be vaccinated.✓ Encourage staff to use every interaction to promote the flu vaccine. For example:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Front desk personnel can share a vaccine information statement ahead of time via email or at check-in.• Medical assistants can encourage vaccination.• If patient declines, the provider can ease specific concerns.	<p>Leverage the electronic health record or immunization registry to screen all patients:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Prior to the first patient of the day, generate a list of scheduled patients who still need a flu vaccine.✓ Use prompts/flags to remind clinicians when patients are due for a vaccine.✓ Encourage medical assistants to use routing slips or other reports to remind physicians to offer the flu vaccine to patients. <p>Make it easy for patients to get their flu shot:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Administer flu vaccines and any other shots at all appointments, including sick visits. Consider co-administering with the current COVID-19 vaccine.✓ Start scheduling flu shot appointments early; prioritize high-risk patients and children who may need two doses.✓ If possible, consider shot-only, drive-up weekend, or evening appointments.

³Sources: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the California Department of Public Health, the Center for Advanced Hindsight and the Centene Center for Health Transformation

Additional considerations:

- Vaccine hesitancy is only a small part of the puzzle. Some people have significant anti-vaccine attitudes, while a much larger population simply does not prioritize vaccination. This latter group should be the ideal target of vaccination campaigns.
- Make getting a vaccine worthwhile. Since vaccination is a matter of motivation, consider using financial reward incentives or other creative ideas to spur uptake.
- Focus on every aspect of the vaccine process. An ideal vaccine uptake program should include these components:
 - Remind patients when they are due for a vaccine.
 - Educate patients about the risks of disease.
 - Remind providers via electronic health records when patient vaccines are due.



Resources

Wellcare has a variety of provider-facing resources that will help you improve the CAHPS/patient experience. They are available online at **www.wellcare.com/California/Providers/Medicare** under *Overview & Resources*. Some examples of materials include:

- Timely access to care.
- Provider tip sheets.
- What is a STAR score?

Make the most of the Plan's multiple resources on improving the patient experience. For additional support, contact **Program_Accreditation@healthnet.com**.