

# FACT SHEET

## CAHPS<sup>®</sup> and the National CAHPS<sup>®</sup> Benchmarking Database

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality • 2101 East Jefferson Street • Rockville, MD 20852



[www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)

AHRQ is the lead agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of health care, reduce its cost, address patient safety and medical errors, and broaden access to essential services. AHRQ sponsors and conducts research that provides evidence-based information on health care outcomes; quality; and cost, use, and access. The information helps health care decisionmakers—patients and clinicians, health system leaders, and policymakers—make more informed decisions and improve the quality of health care services.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Public Health Service

Today's complex and competitive health care environment has generated unprecedented demand for tools and information to document health care quality. The consumer's perspective has become an essential aspect of measuring health care quality and CAHPS (formerly the Consumer Assessment of Health Plans) is recognized as the industry standard for obtaining consumers' assessment of their health plans. CAHPS has expanded to other health care settings such as medical groups and behavioral health services, and to specific populations such as children with chronic conditions.

### CAHPS<sup>®</sup> Development

In October 1995, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) began a new initiative that involved building an integrated set of carefully tested and standardized questionnaires and reporting formats that could be used to collect and report meaningful and reliable information about the experiences of consumers enrolled in health plans. The Agency awarded 5-year grants to consortia headed by the Harvard Medical School, Research Triangle Institute, and RAND. AHRQ also awarded a

contract to Westat to provide technical assistance. These three organizations, along with AHRQ and Westat, formed teams to focus on questionnaire development, reporting product development, and evaluation.

In June 2002, AHRQ funded three 5-year cooperative agreements with the American Institutes for Research, Harvard Medical School, and RAND to continue the research and development of CAHPS along with AHRQ and Westat. Research and development will focus on CAHPS reporting as well as continuing to expand CAHPS beyond health plans to the individual provider level.

### CAHPS<sup>®</sup> Users

CAHPS products are designed to be flexible to meet a variety of needs and satisfy many different users. Sponsors and other users are typically from the following general categories:

- **Purchasers.** Many purchasers, such as individual employers, employer coalitions, purchasing cooperatives, Federal agencies, State Medicaid programs, other State government agencies, and consortia, use CAHPS

## What's New

The CAHPS Consortium will focus on several new projects during the next 5-year research and development phase.

**Hospital CAHPS®.** Currently, a standardized consumer assessment instrument for inpatient care does not exist. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services seeks to develop a standard that could be used for measuring and publicly reporting hospital patient experiences. AHRQ is leading the research and development effort to develop a hospital survey that could be adopted as a standard.

**Provider CAHPS®.** For several years, CAHPS data have been available to help consumers choose health plans. However, many consumers consider the choice of a provider to be more important to their quality of care than their choice of health plan. The CAHPS Consortium developed an instrument to measure consumer assessments of provider groups and is developing an instrument to measure consumer assessments of individual providers.

**Quality improvement.** While the original goal of CAHPS was to provide information to consumers to help them make more informed health care choices, CAHPS results are also used for quality improvement for several reasons. First, only patients can fully assess some aspects of care. Quality improvement in these areas is dependent on measuring consumer assessments. Second, the data from CAHPS surveys can serve multiple purposes to increase the cost-benefit of administering the surveys.

**Cultural comparability.** CAHPS surveys have been translated into many languages. AHRQ recognizes the need to explore new concepts being measured that may not be interpreted the same within different cultures. Both the translation of CAHPS instruments and how the survey items are interpreted by various cultures is a focus of CAHPS research. With our diverse population, understanding the cultural comparability of the survey instruments is essential to interpreting CAHPS results.

data to monitor the quality of the health plans they offer.

- **Quality measurement organizations.** Accrediting organizations, State health care associations, and other organizations are all currently using or endorsing CAHPS for their constituencies.
- **Health plans.** Health plans use CAHPS to differentiate themselves from their competitors as well as conducting CAHPS to comply with accreditation and other reporting requirements. Additionally, many health plans use CAHPS results for quality improvement.
- **Survey vendors and other consultants.** Most CAHPS sponsors work in partnership with a vendor hired to conduct a range of survey-related tasks. Vendors and consultants rely heavily on the survey and reporting products, specifications, and guidance contained in the CAHPS® Survey and Reporting Kit 2002. (See CAHPS Survey and Reporting Kit 2002.)

CAHPS data are collected on health plans in which over 120 million Americans are enrolled.

Current users include:

- U.S. Office of Personnel Management
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
- National Committee for Quality Assurance
- Department of Defense
- Employers and business coalitions
- State Medicaid and State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) agencies
- Health plans

## CAHPS® Future Users

A number of new survey instruments are in development, and it is expected that hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes will conduct CAHPS to comply with CMS and other reporting requirements. In addition, many will use CAHPS results to guide quality improvement initiatives. Also, medical groups and individual providers of care, including doctors, nurses, and therapists will use CAHPS results to improve the quality of care they provide to patients.

## CAHPS® Survey and Reporting Kit 2002

*The CAHPS® Survey and Reporting Kit 2002* provides reliable and valid tools that sponsors can use to help consumers and purchasers assess and select health plans and services. The Kit contains a set of surveys that ask consumers about their experiences with their health care, sample formats for reporting results to consumers, software to assist in data analysis, and guidance and instructions for implementing a CAHPS project from initial planning to report dissemination and evaluation.

The latest version of the Kit is now a Web-only product, available through the Survey Users Network (SUN) Web site. It contains the 3.0 version of the Health Plan Survey that can be downloaded and no longer will be available in print form. Previous versions of the Kit do not support the new survey instruments. Providing the Kit through the Web ensures that users have access to the most up-to-date version. In addition, users who need additional copies of surveys or information can download just what they need rather than ordering a complete Kit. (CD-ROM versions of

the Kit will be made on request for users who have problems with the download.) To download the Kit, go to [www.cahps-sun.org](http://www.cahps-sun.org).

The Kit contains the following survey questionnaires:

- Adult commercial, Medicaid Managed Care, and Medicaid Fee-for-Service
- Child commercial, Medicaid Managed Care, and Medicaid Fee-for-Service
- Adult supplemental questions
- Child supplemental questions

Many of these questionnaires are also available in several languages including Spanish, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Korean, and Khmer (Cambodian).

The *CAHPS reporting templates* currently are available in two forms:

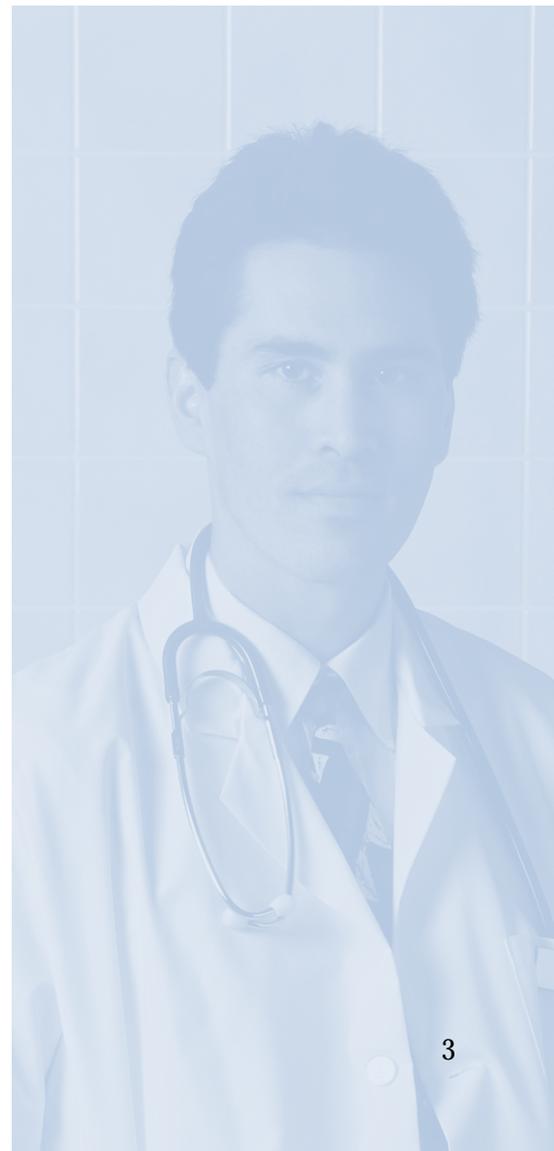
- A print guide, *Compare Your Health Plan Choices*, and
- An interactive computer system, *Decision Helper*.

## National CAHPS® Benchmarking Database (NCBD)

The NCBD facilitates comparisons of CAHPS results among different sponsors, including Medicaid agencies, public and private employers, and individual health plans. The NCBD currently contains 5 years of data from CAHPS. The 2002 database holds survey results for over 360,000 adults and children enrolled in commercial, Medicaid, SCHIP, and Medicare plans.

Benefits of participating in the NCBD include:

- Receive reports that compare survey results to benchmarks derived from the database,



- Access data about individual surveys, and
- Order customized analyses and reports on a fee-for-service basis.

The NCBD is the only source of CAHPS information for all types of care including commercial, Medicaid, and Medicare.

The NCBD is also an important supplier of primary data for conducting research on survey design and health plan and enrollee characteristics that influence performance. With specific authorization, sponsors and researchers may also access other sponsor-specific data files or aggregate or specialized subsets of the NCBD data files. Researchers can access the NCBD

database without charge upon review of the proposed project.

### **Survey Users Network (SUN)**

SUN is a technical assistance and information sharing network that is coordinated and managed by Westat as part of its role as the CAHPS technical assistance contractor.

SUN provides access to all CAHPS tools, assistance on technical aspects of CAHPS, and valuable networking information and resources free of charge.

Additionally, online conferences and workshops on CAHPS topics important to users are held throughout the year. A user's group meeting is also held regularly.

### **For More Information**

For more information or to join SUN, call the CAHPS Helpline at: 800-492-9261.

E-mail SUN at: CAHPS1@westat.com.

Or visit the SUN Web site at: [www.cahps-sun.org](http://www.cahps-sun.org).

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