

## **NEW CMS FIVE-STAR RATINGS**

**JAN. 27, 2021**

### **Key Takeaways & Key Messages**

#### **Key Takeaways**

- On January 27, 2021, nursing home Five-Star ratings were updated for the first time to reflect quality and survey data from 2020 and during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The new ratings reflect the following updates:
  - All three Five-Star domains (survey, staffing, and quality) will operate and update as they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Infection control focused surveys will be counted as complaint surveys. These will be weighted in Five-Star scores for 12 months.
  - Quality measures will reflect performance from July 2019 (Q3 2019) through June 2020 (Q2 2020), including three quarters *before* the COVID-19 pandemic and one quarter during the pandemic.
- Five-Star ratings did not change for most centers. Of the 15,340 nursing homes in the January 2021 release for the nation, 9,937 (65%) saw no change in their Overall rating. Meanwhile, 2,565 (17%) had a decrease of one or more stars and 2,613 (17%) saw an increase in their Overall rating.
- The distribution of Overall, Survey, Staffing, and Quality ratings also similar between December 2020 and January 2021. For example, 61% of nursing homes in the nation have a 4- or 5-Star Quality rating in both December 2020 and January 2021.
- Of the 22 quality measures that were updated to include data through June 2020, the national average showed little absolute change for the vast majority. Only three measures had an absolute change of greater than or equal to one percentage point (long-stay depression worsened from 5.1% to 6.1%, long-stay mobility worsened from 17.1% to 18.5% and short-stay functional improvement improved from 68.0% to 69.0%)

#### **Key Messages**

##### **General:**

- New CMS ratings reflect nursing home performance over a 12-month period that includes months of fighting and surviving COVID-19.
- Our long term care heroes have worked tirelessly for nearly a year, facing relentless challenges, including not being prioritized by public health officials for

resources (PPE, testing, staffing support and funding) for the first several months of the pandemic.

- We are deeply concerned about the prolonged isolation of our residents, which is bad for their health and wellbeing. No one could wish for a swifter end to this pandemic than those who live and work in long term care.
- When we get through this, it's essential that we have a national discussion with public health officials and other stakeholders about how we can learn from this experience and properly support long term care facilities as we prepare for a rapidly growing elderly population.

### **Quality data that shows declining health of residents:**

- We are deeply concerned about the prolonged isolation of our residents, which is bad for their health and wellbeing. No one could wish for a swifter end to this pandemic than those who live and work in long term care.
- Public health officials were put between a rock and a hard place on how to best protect those in long term care, and due to the vicious nature of the virus on our resident population, it was determined best to restrict visitors and social interactions. Had they not, perhaps thousands more would have succumbed to COVID.
- The sad truth is that we're likely to see that many Americans experienced declining physical, mental and emotional health due to this pandemic; long term care residents are not the exception.
- While this is a serious concern, let's not diminish the extraordinary efforts of our health care heroes who put their lives on the lines to fight the virus, provide more one-on-one care, and help fill the void of loved ones by treating residents like family.
- The best way we can address concerns of deteriorating health is to end the pandemic as soon as possible. This is why we've been calling on members of the public to help slow the spread, as well as public health officials to prioritize long term care residents and staff, including with vaccine distribution. We also need to address the workforce shortage crisis in long term care, to ensure there are enough caregivers to help residents have the best quality of life.

### **If regulations and fines come up:**

- More regulations and increased fines will not improve quality in nursing homes, especially during a pandemic. It will only push already struggling facilities to close their doors, leaving vulnerable residents and their families to find alternative care.
- The current survey system is broken, and we are advocating for one that would foster a shared responsibility for improving care.

- Incentivizing providers to improve rather than solely punishing with fines is the better path to foster quality care.
- Nursing homes already face chronic underfunding and slim operating margins, and excessive fines reduce critical resources these centers need to make improvements, or even put them at risk of closing.
- Citations and fines without assistance will not help us keep residents and staff safe.

**On CMS unfreezing the Survey and Quality domains now:**

- We have experienced one of the worst public health crises since the 1918 pandemic, with residents and staff in nursing homes being hit the hardest. Infection rates in the community are surging and staff continue to be stretched to their limits. The focus now must remain on providing our staff and facilities with all the support and resources needed to protect and care for residents.

**Questioning infection control practices:**

- We support enhancing infection prevention and control procedures. We developed the first infection control training programs available for skilled nursing providers more than 18 months before any government-issued training was provided.
  - AHCA has provided training to more than 2,000 infection control specialists across the country.
  - AHCA has worked together with CDC to provide information to providers about preventing and managing resistant infections.
- Research has shown that even with perfect infection control and extensive training, it's nearly impossible to prevent this virus from impacting our long term care residents and staff when there is rampant community spread.
- We must focus on a multi-faceted approach that includes reinforcing infection control best practices as well as slowing the spread in the community and ensuring nursing homes have the resources, they need to fend off the virus.