

A photograph of a female doctor with long dark hair, wearing a white lab coat over blue scrubs, with a stethoscope around her neck. She is smiling and looking towards an elderly patient whose back is to the camera. The patient is wearing blue scrubs. The background is a blurred clinical setting.

2023 Patient Experience Guidebook

United
Healthcare

Improving patient experience scores

Each year, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) sends the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®)* survey and Healthcare Outcomes Survey (HOS) to UnitedHealthcare® Medicare Advantage plan members to gather insights into how they feel about patient experience. CMS uses a Star Ratings Program to help consumers understand a practice's performance.

We also conduct our UnitedHealthcare patient experience survey with our members, and we share the results with you so you can better understand your patients' perceptions.

This guidebook covers the following:



The positive effects of providing excellent patient experiences



Tips for understanding your patient experience scorecard and how to increase survey results



Resources and best practices for how to improve your patient experience scores



Become a United Hero by achieving high patient experience scores

We know how hard you work to maintain strong relationships with your patients. That's why we created the United Heroes program to show our appreciation for health care professionals who achieve high scores on patient experience surveys.

If you're able to hit certain targets by the end of 2023, we'll recognize you as a United Hero. The targets fall into 3 categories: Getting needed care, care coordination and doctor-patient conversations. All United Heroes receive a special award for their commitment to excellent patient experience.

Read on to learn more about the CAHPS survey and HOS, best practices that can positively affect patient experience and how we support you in becoming a United Hero. If you have questions or would like a copy of your personalized scorecard, please contact your UnitedHealthcare representative.

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

Great patient experiences make a difference

By working together, we can help ensure that patients' perceptions surpass their expectations across the continuum of care.



Your patients as partners

Delivering care that is coordinated, managed and continuously improved in active partnership with patients and their care partners is associated^{1,2} with the following benefits:

- Increased patient satisfaction³
- Lower costs for the patient
- Increased success in self-management of disease⁴
- Reduced illness burden
- Fewer hospitalizations
- Decreased use of emergency department
- Shorter lengths of stay



Your practice

- Patients are loyal when they feel their health care professional cares about them and delivers a quality experience⁵
- Patient experience initiatives improve employee satisfaction and reduce staff turnover⁶
- A good patient experience correlates with lower malpractice risk^{7,8}



Your payer relationship

- A good patient experience supports a positive experience for our members, as well as health care professionals and their care teams
- Research shows that patient experience surveys are reliable predictors of quality measures, including better outcomes⁹



Getting needed care

Allowing patients the flexibility to make appointments and receive care in a timely manner is one way you can develop and maintain a positive health care experience.



Patient experience survey question	Pre-visit tip	During the visit tip	Close of visit tip
How easy was it to get an appointment with your personal doctor as soon as you needed?	Allow patients to schedule appointments online.	Offer walk-in time slots, telehealth options and/or appointment times outside regular hours.	Schedule the patient's next appointment at the end of their visit.
How long after your scheduled appointment did you wait to see your doctor?	Use text or message boards to let patients know if you're running behind schedule. Make your waiting rooms inviting, clean and comfortable. Consider giving patients a checklist to prepare for their visit.	If the patient is waiting for the health care professional, we recommend taking their vitals during this time. Staff should check in every 15 minutes to give an update.	If the patient has to wait, apologize and thank them for their patience and understanding. Schedule their next appointment on a less busy day and remind them of other scheduling options (e.g., telehealth).
Did you have any difficulty getting a referral to see a specialist from your doctor?	Confirm that the specialist is accepting new patients before making a referral.	Submit prior authorization requests immediately. Offer the patient an explanation of the referral process.	Schedule patient's specialist appointment at the end of visit. Explain the specialist's role to the patient so they understand which care services the specialist will provide.



Care coordination

Coordinating care among health care professionals helps improve efficiency and shows patients that you respect their time.



Patient experience survey question	Pre-visit tip	During the visit tip	Close of visit tip
Did your doctor seem informed and up to date about the care you received from a specialist?	Ask patients to list their current specialists on their patient portal or to send this information in advance of their visit. If available, gather notes from specialist referrals.	Ask your patients about all the specialists they are seeing. You may be surprised to learn your patients are seeing specialists you're not yet aware of.	Summarize and review specialist information with the patient. Give them a copy of the information they need to take home and post it to the patient portal so it's easily accessible online.
Did your doctor or other health provider review all your prescription medications with you?	Ask patients to bring in their medications or a list of their current medications.	Discuss with patients the medications they are taking, including specialty medications. Listen intently and help simplify the prescriptions the patient is taking by reviewing the name and purpose of each, potential side effects and dosage instructions.	Summarize and review prescription medications with the patient. Give them a copy of the information they need to take home and post it to the patient portal so it's easily accessible online.
Did you receive follow-up from your doctor's office after any blood test, X-ray or other test that you may have completed?	Let the patient know in advance if any tests are planned for their upcoming appointment. Gather results from previous tests that you need to review with them.	Be clear about what tests are being ordered, what they are for, and when and how they can expect results. Let them know if a follow-up appointment will be required.	Summarize and review ordered tests with the patient. Give them a copy of the information they need to take home and post it to the patient portal so it's easily accessible online.



Doctor-patient conversations

Discussing clinical indicators of health with your patients can help you understand their perception of their health and their goals while also building trust to improve their overall well-being.



Patient experience survey question	Pre-visit tip	During the visit tip	Close of visit tip*
Did your doctor or other health provider talk to you about how to prevent falls or treat problems with balance or walking?	Ask all patients to complete a fall assessment in person or prior to their visit.	Ask all patients, regardless of their recent fall history, if they are having difficulty with balance. Display posters and/or use the checklist to discuss balance, falls and treatment options.	Summarize the discussion and make your recommendations for treatment options clear. These may include using a cane/walker, doing an exercise or physical therapy program or suggesting vision or hearing tests.
Did your doctor or other health provider talk to you about ways to better control leaking of urine?	Ask all patients to complete a bladder control assessment in person or prior to their visit.	Ask all patients if they are having difficulty with urine leakage. Display posters and/or use the checklist to discuss bladder control, urine leakage and treatment options.	Summarize the discussion and make your recommendations for treatment options clear. These may include bladder training exercises, medication and/or surgery.
During your visit, did your doctor or other health provider advise you to start, increase or maintain your exercise level?	Ask patients to describe their current exercise routine prior to their visit by filling out a form on the patient portal in advance.	Talk to patients about their current exercise routine. Use the wording “start, increase, or maintain exercise level” to help with patient recall.	Summarize the discussion and make your recommendations for starting, increasing or maintaining exercise clear.

*Consider using the teach-back method at close of visit by checking the patient’s understanding of what was discussed. This best practice involves asking the patient to state in their own words what they need to know or do about their health going forward. This also gives the patient an opportunity to ask questions and better understand their health.¹



Importance of annual wellness visits

The annual wellness visit (AWV) is a great time to provide care services that are more comprehensive than those you're able to provide during annual physical exams.

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,¹ the purpose of the annual wellness visit is to “encourage individuals to take an active role in accurately assessing and managing their health, and consequently improve their well-being and quality of life.”

How AWVs can improve patient experience

During AWVs, you have an opportunity to perform a patient-centered health risk assessment (HRA), complete a wellness review and work with your patient to develop a personalized prevention plan.^{2,3} By providing these additional care services, you can help your patients feel more satisfied with their health care experiences,⁴ which can positively affect the scores you receive from our patient experience survey.

Preparing for positive patient experiences

We encourage you to use this checklist as you plan for delivering excellent patient experiences. Taking these steps may help you receive high patient experience scores in post-visit surveys.

Pre-visit

1. Gather information and let patients know what to expect

- ☐ Provide alternate appointment options (e.g., telehealth, before/after hours or wait list) if it helps them get the care they need, when they need it
- ☐ Request patients bring in a list of specialists they're seeing and any prescription or over-the-counter medications they're taking
- ☐ Send preappointment reminders by email or phone
- ☐ Offer checklists to complete before visit (medical history)
- ☐ Set expectations of office waiting time

2. Establish a care coordination process

- ☐ Obtain and/or order medical records and review them (e.g., lab test results, specialist records and preventive screening results)
- ☐ Send medical records to referring health care professionals

3. Prepare for scheduled patients

- ☐ Review the next day's appointment at the end of every day, or every morning
- ☐ Create patient chart
- ☐ Document patient's preferred communication method

4. Use data to help drive the visit

- ☐ Incorporate patient information from UnitedHealthcare data platforms into your visit (e.g., Patient Care Opportunity Review (PCOR), PreCheck MyScript® (PCMS) and Practice Assist)

During the visit

1. Provide care

- ☐ Review medications
- ☐ Review specialist visits
- ☐ Provide follow-up lab or test information
- ☐ Assess changes in balance, physical activity and bladder control
- ☐ Remind patients that they may receive a patient experience survey by automated call after their visit

2. Complete administrative tasks

- ☐ Request prior authorizations
- ☐ Schedule appointments for specialists or tests and create patient reminders

Post-visit

1. Follow up with patient

- ☐ Give patients a post-visit summary to reference
- ☐ Communicate delivery method and timing of lab or test results
- ☐ Remind the patient they may receive a post-visit follow-up survey
- ☐ Schedule any additional specialist visits, labs or tests

2. Post-discharge follow-up

- ☐ Call patients after hospitalization to follow up on their medications, reconcile their medications and schedule follow-up appointments

3. Review patient survey results and plan for next visit

- ☐ Use the patient experience post-visit survey to help inform areas you could improve



**We want to support
you in delivering
the best possible
patient experience**

After our member visits your office, we survey them and report your specific results to you through monthly scorecards.

The 10 questions on our survey align with the official CAHPS survey and HOS questions that you and your team have the most influence over.



The UnitedHealthcare patient experience survey

Scoring will reflect the percentage of positive responses for each question (shown in boxes).



Getting needed care

1. How easy was it to get an appointment with your personal doctor as soon as you needed?

- ☒ Easy
- ☐ Not easy
- ☐ Somewhat easy
- ☐ Does not apply

2. How long after your scheduled appointment time did you wait to see your doctor?

- ☒ Less than 15 minutes
- ☐ More than an hour
- ☐ 15–30 minutes
- ☐ Does not apply
- ☐ 30–59 minutes

3. Did you have any difficulty getting a referral to see a specialist from your doctor?

- ☒ No difficulty
- ☐ Some difficulty
- ☐ It was difficult
- ☐ Does not apply

Care coordination



4. Did your doctor seem informed and up to date about the care you received from a specialist?

- ☒ Yes, my doctor talked to me about care from my specialist
- ☐ No, my doctor did not speak to me about care from my specialist
- ☐ Did not see a specialist
- ☐ Does not apply

5. Did your doctor or other health provider review all your prescription medications with you?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Does not apply

6. Did you receive follow-up from your doctor's office after any blood test, X-ray or other test that you may have completed?

- ☒ Yes, received a follow-up
- ☐ No, did not receive a follow-up
- ☐ Does not apply

Getting needed Rx



This category helps us detect opportunities to support your patients. This target score does not affect your patient experience score.

7. Did you experience difficulty with your insurance plan covering any medications your doctor prescribed?

- ☒ No difficulty
- ☐ It was difficult
- ☐ Some difficulty
- ☐ Does not apply

Doctor-patient conversations



8. Did your doctor or other health provider talk to you about how to prevent falls or treat problems with balance or walking?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Does not apply

9. Did your doctor or other health provider talk to you about ways to better control leaking of urine?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Does not apply

10. During your visit, did your doctor or other health provider advise you to start, increase or maintain your exercise level?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Does not apply



Talking about the UnitedHealthcare patient experience survey

Within 30 days of receiving a claim for a recent office or telehealth visit, we call the member (please note that it may take up to 45 days to receive claims). Members will receive 1 survey every 4 months.

We encourage you to let your patients know that their feedback is important. Ask them to complete the survey from UnitedHealthcare if they receive one after their visit.

Your patient experience scorecard

In 2023, you must hit the target scores in each of the 3 patient experience categories to become a United Hero.



Review your scorecard results with your UnitedHealthcare representative and care team to identify improvement opportunities.

Survey question	Target score	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	2023	2022
Getting needed care	92%					
1. How easy was it to get an appointment with your personal doctor as soon as you needed?	90%					
2. How long after your scheduled appointment time did you wait to see your doctor?	86%					
3. Did you have any difficulty getting a referral to see a specialist from your doctor?	95%					
Care coordination	88%					
4. Did your doctor seem informed and up to date about the care you received from a specialist?	88%					
5. Did your doctor or other health provider review all your prescription medications with you?	93%					
6. Did you receive follow-up from your doctor's office after any blood test, X-ray or other test that you may have completed?	86%					
Getting needed Rx	94%					
7. Did you experience difficulty with your insurance plan covering any medications your doctor prescribed?	94%					
Doctor-patient conversations	58%					
8. Did your doctor or other health provider talk to you about how to prevent falls or treat problems with balance or walking?	65%					
9. Did your doctor or other health provider talk to you about ways to better control leaking of urine?	46%					
10. During your visit, did your doctor or other health provider advise you to start, increase or maintain your exercise level?	78%					
Patient experience score	80%					

Scoring will **reflect the percentage of positive responses** for each question.

The “**Getting needed Rx**” category helps us detect **opportunities to support your patients**. This score does not affect your patient experience score.

Patient experience scores will be the average of the sum of positive responses in the 3 categories.

Patient experience =
(getting needed care + care coordination + doctor-patient conversations)/3



What are the CAHPS survey and HOS, and why do they matter?

In 2023, 41% of health plans' CMS Star Ratings will come from the CAHPS survey (38%) and HOS (3%).

These 2 federally mandated surveys gather patient feedback every year to better understand health care experiences and outcomes. The results provide valuable insights into how consumers perceive their experience with health care professionals and health plans.

Together, we can use these insights to identify areas of improvement and drive better health outcomes.

For more information about the surveys, please contact your UnitedHealthcare representative or visit cahps.ahrq.gov and hosonline.org.

Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS) survey

From February through June each year, a random sample of Medicare Advantage members receive the CAHPS survey.

38% of total Star Rating based on CAHPS survey results

CMS survey year 2023 weights *	Measures	Survey questions tied to a patient's experience with health care professional
1	Annual flu vaccine	Have you had a flu shot?
4	Getting needed care	How would you rate your ease and timeliness of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting appointments with specialists? • Getting the care, tests or treatment you needed?
4	Getting appointments and care quickly	How often did you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get urgent care as soon as needed? • Get appointments at your doctor's office? • Get seen within 15 minutes of your appointment time?
4	Care coordination Customer service Getting needed Rx drugs	Has your personal doctor or doctor's office: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed your care among different providers and services to your satisfaction? • Followed up promptly on test results? • Talked to you about all the medications you take?
4	Rating of health care	On a scale from 0 to 10, how would you rate your: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall health care? • Personal doctor? • Specialist seen most often?
4	Rating of plan	Survey questions not tied to health care professional
4	Rating of drug plan	Survey questions not tied to health care professional

*Measure weights are subject to change based on CMS guidelines. For more information, please visit [cms.gov](https://www.cms.gov).

Healthcare Outcomes Survey (HOS)

From July through November each year, a random sample of Medicare Advantage members receive the HOS. They'll receive the survey twice in 2 years.

3%

of total Star Rating
based on HOS results

CMS survey year 2023 weights*	Measures	Survey questions tied to a patient's health outcomes with care provider
1	Fall risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you had a fall or issues with walking or balance? When talking with your doctor, have they recommended ways to help prevent falls or treat problems with walking or balance?
1	Management of urinary incontinence	<p>In the past 6 months, have you experienced leaking of urine?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How much did leaking of urine make you change your daily activities or interfere with your sleep? Have you talked with your doctor about treatment options?
1	Physical activity in older adults	<p>In the past 12 months, did you talk with your doctor about your level of exercise or physical activity?</p>
On display until Star Year 2026	Improving or maintaining mental health	<p>During the past 4 weeks, how much of the time have you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Felt calm and peaceful? Had a lot of energy? Felt downhearted and blue?
On display until Star Year 2026	Improving or maintaining physical health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your health now limit you in daily activities like cleaning, climbing a flight of stairs or playing golf? In the last 30 days, has pain interfered with your daily activities either at home or work?

*Measure weights are subject to change based on CMS guidelines. For more information, please visit cms.gov/hos.

Frequently asked questions

Q: Why did UnitedHealthcare add CAHPS and HOS measures to its Medicare Advantage Primary Care Physician Incentive Program (MA-PCPi)?

A: For 2023, CMS has increased the weight of CAHPS survey and HOS measures to 41% of the overall Star Rating program. As a result, we included patient experience measures to the MA-PCPi Average Star Rating Bonus to address the importance of CAHPS and HOS.

Q: Why do health care professionals need to be involved with CAHPS and HOS?

A: Health care professionals and their teams heavily influence patient experience, and UnitedHealthcare wants to do its part in supporting you. That's why we've developed a suite of educational materials to help set you up for success in achieving excellent patient experience scores and becoming a United Hero.

Q: How do you choose the 10 questions on the UnitedHealthcare patient experience survey?

A: We base the 10 questions on composite questions from the CAHPS survey and HOS. These questions represent our greatest opportunities for improving members' perceptions of their patient experiences.

Q: How did you establish the target scores on the UnitedHealthcare patient experience survey?

A: Because CMS doesn't provide Star Rating cut-off points until after they administer CAHPS survey and HOS, it's difficult for health plans to know the specific score to hit to achieve 4 Stars. We rely on previous thresholds and national averages. As such, we base the target scores on a combination of current 4-Star thresholds, an internal analysis of both national averages and our own book of business averages.

Q: If the survey response rates for my patients seems low, how can I increase the number?

- A: There are several reasons why it may appear that you aren't receiving many survey responses:
- We base our survey on claims we receive from your practice. When you submit a claim, we'll survey the patient within 45 days. They receive 1 survey every 4 months.
 - We only survey Medicare Advantage members. For example, if you serve fewer than 100 of these members, your response rates will be low.
 - Your patients who are Medicare Advantage members may benefit from a reminder that they receive the survey on a regular basis throughout the year. Encourage your patients to complete a survey, if they receive one.

Q: Why is care coordination a focus?

A: The main goal of care coordination is to meet patients' needs and preferences in the delivery of high-quality, high-value health care. This means that the health care professional knows the patient's needs and preferences, and they communicate them at the right time to the right people. This information is used to guide the delivery of safe, appropriate and effective care.¹

Q: Why is there a heavier weight for the getting needed care measure?

A: For 2023, CMS increased the weight of this measure on the CAHPS survey. The weight of our getting needed care measure reflects that change.

Q: The doctor-patient conversations category is harder to achieve and doesn't seem appropriate for every member visit. Why does UnitedHealthcare include it?

A: CMS asks members on the HOS if they've discussed fall risk management and urinary incontinence with their doctor. UnitedHealthcare addresses them as part of the patient experience survey and encourages health care professionals to routinely have these conversations. The thresholds for these target are lower than the other survey measures.



Endnotes

Patient experience: Why it matters

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Importance of annual wellness visits

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Frequently asked questions

¹ Care Coordination. Content last reviewed August 2018. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. <https://www.ahrq.gov/ncepcr/care/coordination.html>

Notes

We're here to support you

For more patient experience resources,
visit UHCprovider.com/CAHPSHOS
or connect with your UnitedHealthcare
representative.

To access our self-paced
interactive course, please visit
UHC.com/patientexperience.