



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES  
*Aging and Long-Term Support Administration*  
PO Box 45600, Olympia, Washington 98504-5600

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AL TSA: NH #2019-010  
QSO-19-08-NH APRIL 2019 IMPROVEMENTS TO NURSING HOME COMPARE  
AND THE FIVE STAR RATING SYSTEM

Dear Nursing Facility/Home Administrator:

This letter is to inform you of changes to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Nursing Home Compare website and the Five Star Rating System. CMS announced these changes in a memorandum, [QSO19-08-NH](#).

In 2008, the CMS added the *Five Star Quality Rating System* to the *CMS Nursing Home Compare* website. The rating system comprises three rating domains: Health inspections, Staffing, and Quality Measures (QMs). CMS has periodically made improvements to the website and rating system.

### Health Inspection Ratings

CMS has not included the results from inspections conducted on or after November 28, 2017 in a facility's overall star rating. The rating was "frozen" due to implementation of a new inspection process and Phase 2 of the revised Requirements for Participation for long-term care facilities.

In April 2019, CMS will end the freeze and begin including inspections of facilities conducted on or after November 28, 2017 into a facility's overall star rating calculation. Ratings will again be based on three cycles of inspections (the three most recent standard inspections and any complaint inspections occurring within the past three years).

Additionally, CMS is suppressing the star ratings for Special Focus Facilities (SFFs) (approximately 90 across the country). An icon will still identify these facilities and text will still indicate their status as an SFF. However, their star ratings will not be displayed.

### Quality Measures

- **Short Stay and Long Stay ratings.** To help consumers better understand the level of quality each nursing home provides to these two groups, we are creating separate short-stay and long-stay QM ratings. Each facility will continue to have an overall QM rating, which will be used to calculate the overall nursing home star rating. The overall QM rating will be based equally on the short-stay and long-stay quality ratings.
- **New QM rating thresholds:** CMS expects nursing homes to continue making quality improvements over time, and has periodically raised QM thresholds to promote further progress. CMS is adjusting ratings' thresholds.
- **Implement a process for continual improvement of QM thresholds:** Every six months, QM thresholds will be increased by 50% of the average rate of improvement in QM scores.
- **QM weightings and scoring:** To better reflect the clinical significance and room for improvement in each measure, two different weighting levels are being established: high and medium. The full details of this methodology, including limited exceptions, are available in the [Five-Star Quality Rating System Technical Users' Guide](#).

- **Other QM updates:**
  - CMS will add a new measure of long-stay emergency department transfers to the *Nursing Home Compare* website and the rating system.
  - CMS will replace two short-stay QMs, pressure ulcers and successful discharge to community, with two similar measures from the Skilled Nursing Facility Quality Reporting Program.
  - CMS will remove the QM of long-stay residents who were physically restrained from the Five Star rating. The measure will continue to be reported on the *Nursing Home Compare* website.
  - There are small technical updates to specifications for a few QMs. A new manual describing these changes can be found [here](#).

### Staffing

- **Staffing rating thresholds:** CMS is establishing new thresholds for staffing ratings, including adjusting the staffing rating's grid to increase the weight registered nurse (RN) staffing has on the staffing rating. Please see the staffing domain section of the, "Five-Star Users' Guide April 2019" for more information.
- **Reduce the number of days without an RN for a one-star staffing assignment:** Currently, facilities that report seven or more days in a quarter with no RN onsite are automatically assigned one-star for their staffing rating domain. Beginning in April 2019, the threshold for the number of days without an RN onsite that triggers an automatic downgrade to one-star will be four days.

The effective date of the QSO memorandum is April 24, 2019. For questions about the QSO memorandum, please email: [BetterCare@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:BetterCare@cms.hhs.gov) For questions specific to PBJ or the Staffing domain in general, please email: [NHStaffing@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:NHStaffing@cms.hhs.gov).

Thank you for your continued commitment to resident health and safety. For other questions, please contact Lisa Herke, Nursing Home Policy Program Manager at (509) 225-2819 or [lisa.herke@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:lisa.herke@dshs.wa.gov).

Sincerely,



Candace Goehring, Director  
Residential Care Services

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