

# Hospital Quality Star Rating Summit



On August 23, 2019, National Quality Forum (NQF) convened a diverse panel of more than 20 experts from across the healthcare community with the common goal of ensuring the Star Ratings system is accurate and actionable as a meaningful vehicle to help patients confidently engage in important care decisions.

**Summit participants** representing the array of stakeholder perspectives—patients, consumers, employers and purchasers, healthcare providers, statisticians, and health plans—worked together to develop recommendations to strengthen the Star Ratings system by exploring existing concerns and risk factors as well as suggestions for the Hospital Compare Star Rating system. The convening provided CMS a unique opportunity to hear all voices collaborate on the key issues.

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## KEY CHALLENGES

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) designed the Hospital Star Rating Program to provide patients and healthcare consumers with accessible quality performance data to inform healthcare decisions and help them select healthcare providers. However, the data reported in the program is also used for additional purposes by more stakeholders than it was originally intended. For example, hospitals use the data to drive quality improvement, and purchasers use the ratings to inform decision-making. While some stakeholders find the data useful and supportive of their needs, others express concern and have identified several opportunities for improving the transparency, fairness, and usefulness of the program.

The discussion of the goals and intent of the program focused on opportunities to better align the Star Ratings with core principles and desired outcomes valued by all users. The Panel also examined the measure selection and grouping methods as well as opportunities to make measure groups more meaningful. The discussion on patient risk included a debate on how patient risk, including social factors, could and should be accounted for and considerations for integrating peer grouping in the program methodology. Regarding scoring of hospitals, the dialogue focused on understanding the rationale for current approaches and weighing the trade-offs of employing complex methodologies versus more simplistic approaches. Finally, the Panel offered conceptual, future-focused ideas for reconstructing how hospitals are rated and how ratings are used in the evolving healthcare delivery system.

## HIGH PRIORITY TOPICS

NQF identified critical topics related to program design and implementation by examining input and prior public comments from key stakeholders, referencing related published literature, and through dialogue with CMS representatives.

**The summit agenda centered on five key areas:**

- **Goals and intent of the program**
- **Measure selection and grouping**
- **Scoring of hospitals**
- **Accounting for patient risk**
- **Novel approaches**

## KEY THEMES

Several themes emerged during the deliberations that serve as the foundation for the recommendations that will be put forth by the Panel and NQF.

- There is no available core set of measures that can be used to predict overall hospital quality, but we should continue to try to measure quality on the clinical domains that are meaningful to patients and consumers.
- The current Star Rating approach is an aggregation of measures available on the Hospital Compare

website. The Panel questioned whether this approach provides the right performance data to consumers, purchasers, and providers.

- Transparency to all users about how to interpret the Star Ratings and the program's methods is imperative; the risk of inappropriate use of the ratings is significant without it.
- While there will be trade-offs if a simpler approach is used, the complexity of the methodology, greatly impacts and even diminishes usability and provider efforts to improve quality.
- There is a need for the ratings to consider both simplicity and specificity (i.e., granularity at the level of hospital services or clinical conditions) to improve the usefulness of the information provided.
- All challenges with the program cannot be mitigated with statistical methodologies, but may be resolved by other approaches.

- There is an opportunity to enhance the presentation of the ratings to make them more actionable and relevant by considering how users want to view and interact with the summary information provided.
- While specific to the Hospital Star Ratings, recommendations for improving the program may also be applicable to other programs and rating systems.

## NEXT STEPS

Through productive dialogue, the NQF Panel surfaced actionable recommendations for CMS to consider in the next iteration of the Star Ratings program. NQF will release a briefing detailing the Summit's deliberations and recommendations to CMS in the coming months following Member commenting.

The National Quality Forum (NQF) works with members of the healthcare community to drive measurable health improvements together. NQF is a not-for-profit, membership-based organization that gives all healthcare stakeholders a voice in advancing quality measures and improvement strategies that lead to better outcomes and greater value. Learn more at [www.qualityforum.org](http://www.qualityforum.org).