



Medicare Health Outcomes Survey (HOS)

2024 HOS Survey Vendor
Minimum Business Requirements and
Rules of Participation

Final

Medicare HOS 2024 Survey Vendor Minimum Business Requirements

A survey vendor must meet all Minimum Business Requirements listed below to be considered for approval to administer the Medicare HOS on behalf of Medicare Advantage (MA) clients in 2024. The standardized data collection protocol for administering the 2024 HOS will be specified in the *2024 Medicare Health Outcomes Survey Quality Assurance Guidelines and Technical Specifications V2.8 (QAG)* and the *Fully Integrated Dual-Eligible (FIDE) Special Needs Plans (SNP) QAG Addendum*.

Relevant Survey Experience

Demonstrated recent experience in fielding patient experience surveys.

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| Number of Years in Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of four years. Subcontractor experience cannot be used to fulfill the Number of Years in Business requirement. |
| Organizational Survey Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum of three years of prior experience administering standardized patient experience and/or functional health status and/or self-reported health surveys for Medicare or other vulnerable/elderly populations as an organization within the most recent five-year period. • Minimum of three years of prior experience conducting large-scale mixed mode (mail and telephone) survey protocols within the most recent five-year period (i.e., mail survey administration followed by survey administration via computer assisted telephone interview [CATI] follow-up of nonrespondents). • Prior experience submitting survey data electronically to an external third-party organization. • If applicable, poor past performance by survey vendor and/or its subcontractor(s) on Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) surveys of people with Medicare will be considered as failing to meet Minimum Business Requirements. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to adhere to the timeline and/or procedures for survey administration. ○ Failure to submit accurate and complete survey data on time during interim and/or final data submission periods. ○ Failure to adhere to required quality oversight activities. |

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Failure to adhere to Discrepancy Report submission timelines and procedures and to appropriately implement and manage required corrective actions. |
| Experience with Multiple Survey Languages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Survey vendor (and subcontractor(s), if applicable) must have prior experience administering mail and telephone surveys in English and Spanish. ● Survey vendor will have the option of conducting the survey in Chinese and Russian. |

Organizational Survey Capacity

Capacity to handle a required volume of mail questionnaires and conduct standardized telephone interviewing in a specified time frame.

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| Capacity to Handle Estimated Workload | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sufficient physical and personnel resources to administer large-scale outgoing and incoming mail surveys and to perform telephone interviews using an electronic telephone interviewing system. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All survey-related activities must be conducted within the continental United States, Hawaii, Alaska, and U.S. Territories. ○ Must adhere to requirements specified in the QAG. |
| Personnel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Designated Personnel directly employed by the survey vendor (i.e., not subcontractor): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project Director and Project Manager with at least three years of experience in overseeing all functional aspects of survey operations including mail, telephone, data file preparation, and data security. The Project Director and Project Manager oversee all survey operations. ○ Mail Supervisor with at least one year of previous experience managing large-scale mail survey projects. The Mail Supervisor provides oversight of all mail protocol operations and provides oversight of mail subcontractors and external partners (if applicable). <p><i>Note: An “external partner” is defined as an organization utilized by the survey vendor to perform a specific aspect of HOS administration. While it is assumed that a subcontractor will have access to personally identifiable information (PII), an external partner may furnish goods or services to support HOS</i></p> |

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| | <p><i>administration without access to PII.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Telephone Supervisor with at least one year of previous experience managing large-scale telephone interviewing projects. The Telephone Supervisor provides oversight of all telephone protocol operations and provides oversight of approved telephone interview subcontractors (if applicable). ○ Lead or Primary Programmer with at least one year of experience preparing and submitting electronic data files in a specified format to an external third-party organization within the past two years. The Lead or Primary Programmer is responsible for data submission. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sufficient experienced organizational back-up staff to manage functions of survey administration in the absence of key staff. |
| System Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commercial physical plant and system resources must meet CMS specifications and accommodate data collection and processing of the volume of surveys being administered. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capacity for production and mailing of questionnaires, cover letters, and postcards in-house or in accordance with requirements outline in “Approved Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners”. ○ All survey-related work, including mail survey administration activities and telephone interviewing, must be conducted at the survey vendor’s or approved subcontractor/external partner’s official business location. Home-based places of work (e.g., residences) and virtual organizations will not be permitted without CMS approval. ○ Capacity to handle concurrent survey projects while maintaining high quality survey data and high response rates. ○ Capacity to process incoming paper surveys (e.g., scan or key enter) at the survey vendor’s or designated subcontractor/external partner’s official business location. ● Electronic telephone interviewing systems programmed in accordance with QAG. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capacity to conduct telephone interviews using an electronic telephone interviewing system in-house or in accordance with requirements outlined in “Approved Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners.” ○ Capacity to record all telephone surveys. |

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A secure work environment for receiving, processing, and storing hardcopy and electronic versions of questionnaires, sample files, and supplemental files that protects the confidentiality of survey data and PII and protects the integrity of the survey. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Electronic survey management system that tracks fielded surveys through the entire protocol using unique de-identified member identification numbers and interim disposition codes. ○ Secure file transfer protocol or systems to receive member contact information from contract clients in a manner that is Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA] compliant. |
| <p>Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners (Subject to Approval)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMS must approve subcontractors and other external partners as part of the survey vendor approval process at the time of application. • Subcontractors and other external partners must meet the criteria outlined for the survey administration activities they will perform. • Subcontracting of data file preparation and submission is not permitted. • Subcontractors and other external partners added after the application process are subject to approval by CMS. Survey vendor must inform the HOS Project Team immediately and update the Data Use Agreement (DUA) within 3 business days of changes in subcontractor(s) and/or external partner(s). • Survey vendor is responsible for supervising and providing quality oversight of all subcontracted tasks and/or those tasks completed by an organization external to the survey vendor. • All survey functions performed externally (i.e., not using the survey vendor's physical resources and/or in-house staff) must be listed in both the Participation Form and the survey vendor's Quality Assurance Plan. This includes, but is not limited to, organizations with which the survey vendor has subcontractor or purchased service agreements. |

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| <p>Mixed Mode Administration</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for reproducing, printing, assembling, and mailing survey materials in accordance with the QAG. • Responsible for programming electronic telephone interviewing systems in accordance with the QAG. • Demonstrate ability to collect, accurately process, and code survey data through all phases of survey administration. • Maintain capacity for conducting telephone interviews using a CATI system. • Use commercial software/resources to ensure that addresses and telephone numbers are updated and correct for all sampled members. • Maintain an interviewer pool that meets the needs of sampled members in all languages in which the survey is administered, except Russian. • Conduct accurate monitoring of interviewers in all languages in which the survey vendor is fielding the survey. • Assign appropriate disposition codes to each sampled member indicating final survey status. • Demonstrate ability to adhere to the survey administration timeline. • Attest that the organization meets the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) requirements by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for dialing cell phones. |

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| <p>Data Submission</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow all data preparation and submission rules as specified in the QAG. • Submit data electronically in the specified format outlined in the QAG. • Execute business associate agreements with MA contracts and receive annual authorization from MA contracts to collect data on their behalf and submit to CMS. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Must be authorized by a MA contract prior to receiving the sample file. • Work with the HOS Project Team to resolve data and data file submission problems. • Complete attestation of data quality during final data submission. • Submit data files as requested by the HOS Project Team within the specified timeframe. |
| <p>Data Security and Confidentiality</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain established electronic security procedures related to access levels, passwords, and firewalls as required by HIPAA. • Perform regularly scheduled data back-up at least daily and off-site redundancy procedures that adequately safeguard system data; procedures must include backup recovery testing to verify files can be retrieved. • Develop a disaster recovery plan to support continued business operations or recovery in the event of a natural or human-related disaster. • Use required encryption protocols, if applicable, for transmitting data files. CMS-defined PII must be transmitted securely (e.g., encrypted file via email, data portal, or SFTP). • Implement established procedures for identifying and reporting breaches of confidential data. Data files (electronic or paper) must be stored securely and confidentially in accordance with the QAG. • Ensure confidentiality of sampled members' identifying information during each phase of the survey process. Only contract-level data may be shared with MA contracts, as specified in the QAG (i.e., no member-level or member identifying information can be shared with MA contracts). • Develop and obtain signed confidentiality agreements from staff and subcontractors (i.e., those individuals and organizations with access to PII). Confidentiality agreements must be reviewed and re-signed periodically, at the discretion of the survey vendor, but not |

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| | <p>to exceed a three-year period.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and maintain a Data Use Agreement (DUA) for access to data from CMS for use in collection of additional member-level information on persons with Medicare. • Ensure the DUA is kept up to date and that all CMS requirements are followed, including documenting all subcontractors and key personnel. Survey vendor will submit a DUA update within three business days if any change in subcontractors or key personnel occurs after the initial DUA submission. • Ensure compliance with all applicable HIPAA Security and Privacy Rules in conducting all survey administration and data collection activities. |
| Data Retention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to retain all data files (electronic or paper) for a minimum of three years, or as otherwise specified by the QAG, onsite at the survey vendor’s facilities. The retention requirement also applies to sample information. The retention of data will require extension of the DUA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Store returned paper questionnaires in a secure and environmentally safe location until December 31 of the following survey administration year, or as otherwise specified by the QAG, onsite at the survey vendor’s facilities. Scanned images must be retained for three years. ○ Record all telephone interviews and retain all telephone survey recordings for three years or as otherwise specified by the QAG, onsite at the survey vendor’s facilities. ○ Archived electronic data files, telephone recordings, and paper copies or scanned images of surveys must be easily retrievable. • Establish a process for data destruction after three years and complete an attestation of data destruction. |

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| Technical Assistance/ Customer Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish toll-free customer support telephone lines with live operators Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (survey vendor local time), either in-house or in accordance with requirements outlined in “Approved Use of Subcontractors and Other External Partners.” • Establish a customer support email address for members who have questions about the survey or their eligibility. • All emails received through the customer support email address and survey vendor responses must be forwarded to the HOS Project Team via secure transfer network. • Accommodate telephone and email inquiries in all languages in which the survey vendor is fielding the survey, starting at the beginning of the survey fielding period (i.e., prenotification mailing date) and continuing through the duration of survey fielding (i.e., through the end of data collection). |

Quality Control Procedures

Personnel training and quality control mechanisms employed to collect valid, reliable survey data.

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| Demonstrated Quality Control Procedures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish, conduct, and document quality control procedures for all phases of survey implementation and in all languages in which the survey vendor is fielding the survey, as specified in the QAG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monitoring of subcontractor(s), if applicable. ○ Internal staff and subcontractor/external partner training. ○ Printing, mailing, and recording receipt of surveys. ○ Telephone administration of surveys (electronic telephone interviewing system) in all languages in which the survey is administered, except Russian. ○ Scanning, coding, and processing of survey data. ○ Preparing interim data files for submission and resolving any identified errors. ○ Preparing final data files for submission and resolving any identified errors. ○ All other functions and processes that affect the administration of the HOS surveys. |

| Criteria | Survey Vendor Requirements |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical business premises on which major operations of survey business are conducted are amenable to site visits by CMS and the HOS Project Team, as specified in the QAG. • Subcontractors and other external partners must meet the criteria outlined for the survey administration activities they will perform. |
| Training Requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in and successfully complete the HOS Survey Vendor Training (via Webinar) after confirmation of conditionally-approved status. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participate in all poll questions administered during the training. ○ Complete a post-training test. ○ Complete a training evaluation. • Participate in any refresher training sessions or webinars. • At a minimum, the organization’s Project Director, Project Manager, Mail Supervisor, Telephone Supervisor, and the Lead or Primary Programmer must attend the annual training as representatives of the organization. • At least one representative from subcontractors and other external partners performing the following key survey administration responsibilities must attend training. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inserting or survey packet preparation. ○ Processing of returned mail surveys. ○ Conducting telephone interviews (CATI administration). • All survey vendor staff responsible for data coding and file preparation are strongly recommended to attend training. |
| Oversight | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare, accommodate, and plan for announced or unannounced site visits and/or remote quality oversight activities from CMS or the HOS Project Team for quality oversight purposes. • All system resources must meet CMS specification in the QAG and are subject to oversight activities, including remote quality oversight activities and in-person site visits to physical locations. • Prepare and submit reports as requested by the HOS Project Team, such as reports of outbound CATI progress and inbound mail processing. • Comply with all quality oversight requirements described in the QAG, including submitting mail materials and telephone |

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| | <p>interviewing screenshots to the HOS Project Team for review prior to survey administration. This also includes all subcontractor and external partner materials.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and submit an annual Quality Assurance Plan by specified due date in the QAG. • Submit an initial Discrepancy Report and corrective action plan within one business day of becoming aware that a discrepancy in survey administration has occurred. |

Approval Term

An approved survey vendor may administer the Medicare Health Outcomes Survey for the specified amount of time.

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| Approval Term | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-year term is subject to annual re-approval based on submission and review of the Participation Form.• Approval as a survey vendor in prior years does not guarantee future re-approval.• Approval and/or re-approval as a survey vendor is dependent on successful past performance. Performance criteria include, but are not limited to:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Occurrence of similar substantive errors within or across projects.○ Significant non-compliant items identified during site visits or monitoring.○ Receipt of a corrective action memo from CMS.○ CMS requests for quality improvement plans.○ Refusal to allow site visit team to observe HOS production activities.• Survey vendor must administer HOS and submit data for a minimum of one MA contract within two years of approval (if applicable) to remain eligible for re-approval. Multiple years as an approved vendor without HOS clients will be negatively weighted as a decision factor when considering re-approval. |

HOS 2024 Rules of Participation

Any organization participating in the 2024 HOS administration must adhere to the following Rules of Participation. To be eligible, the organization must:

1. Meet the HOS Minimum Business Requirements.
2. Participate in teleconference call(s) with the HOS Project Team to discuss relevant survey experience, organizational survey capability and capacity, quality control and assurance procedures, and the role of subcontractors and other external partners, if applicable.
3. Participate in the HOS Survey Vendor Training, participate in polling questions administered during the training, complete the post-training test, and complete the training evaluation. Participate in any refresher training sessions or webinars. At a minimum, the organization's Project Director, Project Manager, Mail Supervisor, Telephone Supervisor, and the Lead or Primary Programmer must attend the annual training as representatives of the organization. At least one representative from subcontractors and other external partners performing major functions with key survey administration responsibilities including inserting or survey packet preparation, the processing of returned mail surveys, and conducting telephone interviews must attend training.
4. Complete and maintain a DUA for access to data from CMS for use in collection of additional member-level information on persons with Medicare. Survey vendors are required to include all subcontractors on the DUA. Survey vendors must notify the HOS Project Team immediately of any key personnel changes or if subcontractors are added or removed after submission of the Participation Form. A DUA update must also be submitted within three business days if any change in subcontractors occurs after the initial DUA is submitted to the HOS Project Team.
5. Comply with all rules and regulations pertaining to PII and protected health information (PHI) per HIPAA.
6. Review and follow the QAG and all policy updates.
7. Develop and submit an HOS Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) by the specified deadline, including plans to provide quality oversight of subcontractors and external partners. In addition, submit materials relevant to the survey administration (as determined by CMS), including mailing materials (e.g., cover letters and questionnaires) and screenshots of telephone interviewing systems.
8. Store paper HOS surveys onsite until December 31 of the following survey administration year and retain electronic images for three years.
9. Record all telephone interviews and retain all telephone survey recordings for three years.

10. Destroy data after three years and complete an attestation of data destruction.
11. Participate and cooperate by including subcontractors and other external partners in all oversight activities conducted by the HOS Project Team, including but not limited to, survey material review, site visits, remote telephone interview monitoring, remote data record review, data audits, and other oversight activities as determined by CMS.
12. Submit interim and final HOS data files via the HOS Data Submission System on time, as specified by the deadline determined by CMS.
13. Through agreement with these Rules of Participation, attest to the accuracy of the organization's HOS data collection, following the guidelines set forth in the most current version of the QAG.
14. Notify the HOS Project Team of any discrepancies or variations from the standard HOS protocol that occur as the discrepancy is identified. Survey vendor must complete and submit a Discrepancy Report Form within one business day of becoming aware of a discrepancy.
15. Acknowledge that the use of remote operations is prohibited unless approved by CMS.
16. Disclose business relationships with sponsors of MA contracts for potential conflicts of interest annually. Survey vendor may not administer the HOS to meet CMS requirements for an MA contract client that controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with the survey vendor.
17. Acknowledge that CMS may, at its sole discretion, terminate, discontinue, or not renew the "approved" status of a survey vendor.
18. Acknowledge that the survey vendor must contract with and administer the HOS on behalf of at least one MA contract within two years of initial approval status to remain eligible for reapproval.
19. Acknowledge that fielding non-CMS surveys using HOS questions to people with Medicare could have a negative effect on the official survey response rates and measure scores.