

## You and your staff can strongly impact HOS scores and the Medicare Star rating

The Health Outcome Survey (HOS) is used by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to assess patients' perception of you, your staff, and Blue Shield of California. Scores from this survey figure prominently in determining Blue Shield's Medicare Star rating. A 5-Star rating increases our enrollment and brings more patients to your practice. To improve HOS success, here are best practice recommendations and educational resources by measure.

### HOS measure – Physical health: In the past four weeks...

- Q Would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?
- Q Are you experiencing limitations in typical daily activities such as moving a table, vacuuming, bowling, playing golf, or climbing stairs?
- Q Have you accomplished less than you would like or felt limited in work or other activities?
- Q Has pain interfered with your normal work, both inside and outside the home?

#### Recommendations:

- Ask patients about their physical well-being and if appropriate, level of pain/discomfort.
- Suggest physical therapy or pain management if needed.
- Recommend ways to begin and/or continue to engage in physical activities (e.g., no cost [SilverSneakers](#)® programs that include in-home work-out kits, online exercise modules, and gym membership discounts).

### HOS measure – Improving or maintaining mental health: In the past four weeks...

- Q Because of emotional problems such as feeling depressed or anxious, have you accomplished less than you would like or not performed as carefully as usual?
- Q How much of the time in the last four weeks have you: (1) Felt calm and peaceful? (2) Had a lot of energy? (3) Felt downhearted and blue?
- Q How much of the time has your physical health or emotional problems interfered with your social activities (like visiting with friends, relatives, etc.)?

#### Recommendations:

- Assess and discuss mental health status at every appointment, even when your patient has not screened positive for a mental health condition.
- Consider conducting a PHQ9 annually, and more frequently if appropriate.
- Create a staff list of mental health carve outs and individual health plan referral processes.
- Refer patients to educational resources like the [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIH\)](#) and/or [CredibleMind](#), Blue Shield's mental health resource hub. (CredibleMind resources are available to members and non-members.)

### HOS measure – Monitoring physical activity: In the past 12 months...

- Q Have you talked with your doctor or health provider about exercise or physical activity? For example, were you asked if you exercise regularly or take part in physical exercise?
- Q Did your doctor or health provider advise you to start, increase, or maintain your exercise level or physical activity? For example, were you advised to take the stairs, increase walking from 10 to 20 minutes daily, or maintain your current exercise program?

**Recommendations:**

- Discuss the benefits of physical activity and assess your patient's physical activity level.
- Use the Exercise is Medicine® [physical activity prescription form](#) with your patients.
- Refer patients with limited mobility to physical therapy to learn safe and effective exercises.
- Refer patients to Blue Shield of California's online health library [Fitness and Exercise](#) resources. (Health library resources are available to members and non-members.)

**HOS measure – Urinary incontinence: In the past six months...**

- Q Have you accidentally leaked urine? If yes, how much of a problem was this for you?
- Q Have you talked with your doctor or health provider about your urine leakage?
- Q There are many ways to treat urinary incontinence (i.e., bladder training, medication, surgery). Have you talked with your doctor or healthcare provider about any of these?

**Recommendations:**

- Discuss urinary incontinence with patients or ask nursing staff/medical assistants to do so.
- Encourage staff to view Blue Shield's recorded webinar, [Talking with Older Patients About Sensitive Topics](#). (45 min)
- Display urinary incontinence patient education materials in exam rooms.
- Review the patient's medications list for any that can contribute to bladder control issues.
- Educate patients about noninvasive behavioral interventions for urinary incontinence; when necessary, refer for appropriate treatment such as urology or pelvic floor therapy.

**HOS measure – Reducing risk of falling: In the past 12 months...**

- Q Did you talk with your doctor or health provider about issues with falling, walking, or balance?
- Q Has your doctor or health provider done anything to help prevent falls or treat problems with balance or walking? Some things they might do include: (1) Suggest that you use a cane or walker; (2) Check your blood pressure lying and standing; (3) Suggest that you do an exercise or physical therapy program; (4) Suggest a vision or hearing test.

**Recommendations:**

- Teach staff how to screen for fall risk (see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) STEADI [Fall Risk Factors Checklist](#)) and how to [administer gait/balance assessments](#). (Scroll to Functional Assessments.)
- Access Blue Shield's online module. [Preventing Falls: Exercises for Strength and Balance](#).
- Assess fall risk and discuss fall prevention activities with each patient.
- Review the patient's medications list for any that can contribute to lightheadedness, drowsiness, or otherwise increase fall risk.
- Encourage annual eye exams and regular prescription updates.
- Promote exercise, specifically those that increase leg strength and balance – suggest [SilverSneakers](#) for in-person and online class options.
- Consider referral to a home health occupational/physical therapist for home safety evaluation and modification (e.g., handrails in the shower, using a cane or walker).
- Distribute [CDC STEADI fall prevention education materials](#) by email and/or consider providing copies in your waiting and exam rooms.

For questions or additional information about the HOS survey and/or Medicare Star measures, please send inquiries to [MedicareStarRating@blueshieldca.com](mailto:MedicareStarRating@blueshieldca.com).