

Updates for the May 2019 Hospice Compare Refresh

External Questions and Answers

Hospice Characteristics Added to Hospice Compare

Question 1: What data are being added to enhance the Hospice Compare search?

Response: Beginning in May 2019, Hospice Compare will post data from the Hospice Utilization and Payment Public Use File (Hospice PUF). Hospice Compare displays this data describing the characteristics of Medicare hospice organizations in a user-friendly format. These data include: the number of patients cared for by a hospice organization on average each day (average daily census); levels of hospice care provided; conditions treated;¹ and site of service where care was provided.² The data will appear under a series of tabs that users can access when they view provider results.

Question 2: Where do the new data come from?

The data come from the Hospice Utilization and Payment Public Use File (Hospice PUF) available at: <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Medicare-Provider-Charge-Data/Hospice.html> We use the latest three years of Hospice PUF data to provide the enhanced information on hospice characteristics on Hospice Compare.

Updates to the Zip Code File Powering the Search Function on Hospice Compare

Question 1: What are the updates to the Zip code file used to power the search function on Hospice Compare?

RESPONSE: CMS made two updates to the Zip code file as part of the May refresh of Hospice Compare. One update was the annual update of Zip codes from claims data. This complements quarterly updates of the Zip codes from Hospice Item Set (HIS) data, to ensure the search function on Hospice Compare is as consistent, up-to-date, and comprehensive as possible.

The second update removed Zip codes that a hospice has not served for at least 12 months. Only a small percentage of ZIP codes (2%) were removed as a result of this process, and for the majority of hospices, fewer than five ZIP codes were removed.

¹ A beneficiary will only be counted in one of the six diagnostic categories, depending on which primary diagnosis the beneficiary received for the most hospice care days.

² Site of service is based on where the beneficiaries received the most hospice care days.

Question 2: What data sources are used to prepare the Zip code database?

Response: CMS uses ZIP codes of the locations where hospices provided care from both Medicare claims and HIS data. CMS also uses geographic data from the United States Census Bureau to validate and improve the accuracy of the ZIP codes drawn from the claims data.

Question 3: What is the process for removing ZIP codes and why is CMS applying it?

Response: All ZIP codes from the latest HIS and claims data are added to the list of ZIP codes compiled from previous HIS and Medicare claims data. To ensure that the ZIP code database remains accurate, CMS has started an ongoing process to remove ZIP codes that are likely not representative of hospice providers' active service areas. Specifically, CMS will remove ZIP codes that a hospice has not served for at least 12 months. The removal process will help keep the ZIP code database up-to-date and maintain a more accurate representation of hospices in the geographic areas where they are active, thereby making the search function more accurate.

Question 4: As of May 2019, what time periods will the most recent ZIP code database cover?

Response: As of May 2019, ZIP code data from the HIS will include the service locations of patients discharged as early as April 2017 and as late as June 2018. ZIP code data from Medicare claims will include the service locations and hospice mailing addresses from calendar year 2017 claims, along with those from calendar year 2016.

Question 5: How is the accuracy of the search function maintained now?

Response: Accuracy of the search function is based on ZIP codes from Medicare claims that are validated with United States Census Bureau data and the ZIP codes from the HIS. These sources create a comprehensive and accurate database for Hospice Compare. The regular quarterly updates of the HIS ZIP codes help ensure the search function remains up-to-date. Removing old ZIP codes will further improve the accuracy of the database. Further, CMS monitors the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the search function, especially for small hospices and hospices located in rural areas. CMS is sensitive to the potential for changes in the search function to affect small or rural hospices more than other hospices and actively monitors the database for any potential need for further updates.