This glossary provides brief definitions for commonly used terms related to patient experience of care. Measurement and reporting of patient experience are different from other types of quality measures and therefore introduce terminology that may be unfamiliar to some. We ask your assistance in ongoing improvement to this glossary. If you encounter a term missing from this glossary, please submit your suggested addition to Dale Shaller at d.shaller@comcast.net.

**Access**

A domain measured by the CAHPS surveys that refers to a patient’s ability to get health care appointments, information, and care in a timely manner. For example, the Getting Timely Appointments, Care, and Information composite within the CG-CAHPS survey fits under the access domain and includes survey items about getting appointments as soon as they are needed, receiving timely answers to medical questions when calling the clinic, and wait time while at the clinic for an appointment.

**CAHPS**

The Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems program produces free, nonproprietary survey instruments designed to support standardized measurement of the experiences of patients and health plan enrollees with care in a variety of settings. They have been developed by prominent research organizations under the auspices of the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (www.cahps.ahrq.gov).

**CG-CAHPS Survey**

The CAHPS Clinician & Group survey asks patients about their experiences with physicians (or other providers) and their staff. Instruments are available for adults receiving primary or specialty care as well as children receiving primary care. A new version of CG-CAHPS is under development to assess patient experiences in a patient-centered medical home (PCMH) practice (see PCMH survey).
Cognitive Testing

Cognitive testing uses one-on-one personal interviews to explore respondents’ comprehension of the questions, their ability to answer the questions, and the adequacy of the response choices. Testing also helps identify words that can be used to describe health care providers accurately and consistently across a range of consumers and explores whether key words and concepts work equally well in both English and Spanish.

Completed Survey

Any survey in which the respondent answers at least half of the key question items.

Composite

A set of survey items measuring similar topics that are grouped together to produce a score that is easier for consumers to interpret than individual survey items and often more reliable (see reliability). The CG-CAHPS survey allows for three composite measure groupings: Getting Timely Appointments, Care, and Information; How Well Doctors Communicate with Patients; and Helpful, Courteous, and Respectful Office Staff.

Continuous Sampling

A method of sampling patients to be surveyed on a near real-time basis. For example, practices may compile a list of all patients who have had a visit on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis and regularly send this information to their survey vendor. The vendor then uses these lists of patient visits as the sample frame from which to draw samples of patients to survey. In continuous sampling, the sample frame becomes a rolling file in which patients typically remain eligible to be surveyed as long as their visit was within the last three months.

Core Question Set

A set of required questions consistent across all versions of the CG-CAHPS survey (including the PCMH survey) that lends itself to comparisons of validated composite measures across entities.

Data Collection Mode

The method used to collect survey responses. Modes include mail, telephone, IVR (interactive voice response), web completion, and email administration with web completion.

Domain

A major thematic area covered in the CAHPS surveys, which include access, interpersonal care, and administrative services. Each type of CAHPS survey has one or more composite groupings that fit within these domains.

Email Administration with Web Completion

A survey administration method that uses an email invitation with an embedded URL to link the sampled survey respondent to a web site for online survey completion.

Field Period

The period during which data are collected. The field period begins when surveys are first administered (e.g., when surveys are first mailed out or phone calls are first attempted for telephone administration) and continues until data collection stops. Field periods can be defined either by time period (e.g., July 1–Sept. 30) or by a specific milestone (e.g., collect data until 300 survey responses are received).
Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

A survey administration method that relies on either voice-activated or touch-tone telephone responses to collect survey data from the sample of respondents.

Legacy Questions

Long-standing survey questions used by an organization that have allowed for trending of results over time.

Look-Back Period (see Measurement Period)

A span of time prior to the field period during which patient visits took place and are eligible for survey measurement. With the visit survey, for example, a three-month look-back period is typically used (i.e., all patients who had a visit in the last three months are included in the sample frame). The look-back period does not apply to surveys that are administered using continuous sampling.

Mail Mode

A survey administration method that uses paper surveys, preferably formatted according to CAHPS specifications with a cover letter, for reaching the sample of respondents. Standard mail protocol recommended by the CAHPS Consortium begins with an initial mailing, followed by a postcard reminder 10 days after the initial mailing, and then a second mailing three to four weeks after the first mailing to those who have not responded.

Measurement Period

A broad term used across performance measurement to designate the time period during which performance will be examined. In the case of patient experience, the measurement period refers to a specific period in time in which patient visits take place and are eligible to be examined through the use of patient surveys. For survey measurement, the measurement period is sometimes referred to as the look-back period because often the measurement period pertains to patient visits that took place during a defined period in the past.

NQF Endorsement


PCMH Survey

A new CAHPS survey instrument to evaluate the patient-centered medical home model for its effectiveness, efficiency, and patient-centeredness of care. The survey contains the same core questions found in the CG-CAHPS survey and adds CAHPS supplemental items as well as new items that together assess several important aspects of medical home care.

Psychometric Testing

Analyses of data collected using the questionnaire to examine certain properties such as response rates, missing data, completion rates, internal reliability, and site-level reliability.

Reference Period

The time period the respondent is being asked to consider when answering the survey question. Respondents may be asked to think about the past 12 months, six months (for Medicaid enrollees), or only about a single visit when answering a question about their experience.
Reliability
The extent to which a survey item will produce consistent results.

Response Rate
The total number of *survey completes* divided by the total number of patients selected to be surveyed.

Response Scale
The set of response choices for each survey question item which measure the frequency of various experiences. The original CG-CAHPS 12-month survey is available with either a four-point scale (Never/Sometimes/Usually/Always) or a six-point scale (adds Almost Never and Almost Always to the four-point scale). For the visit survey, response options for items referring to the most recent visit are an expanded Yes/No scale (Yes, definitely/Yes, somewhat/No).

Sample
The set of patients to be surveyed, selected randomly from the *survey frame* and in enough quantity to statistically approximate the experience of all patients eligible to be surveyed.

Sample Frame
The complete list of all patients who are eligible to be surveyed based on specifications, from which the *sample* will be drawn.

Supplemental Survey Items
A variety of optional questions that can be added to the *core question set* to address specific topics of interest and construct a customized CG-CAHPS survey.

Telephone Mode
A survey administration method that relies on telephone contact to reach the sample of respondents. Telephone administration often uses computerized assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) to connect a live operator to the sampled respondent. CAHPS protocols suggest at least six attempts be made to connect with the sample of respondents.

Top-Box Score
The percentage of responses in the most positive response category. For example, if a report gives the proportion of respondents who replied “always” to the survey item asking how often the doctor carefully listened to them (with “always” representing the most positive answer possible), this would be the top-box score for that survey item.

Twelve-Month Survey
The original CG-CAHPS survey version which asks patients about their experience during a *reference period* of the last 12 months.

Validity
The extent to which a survey item measures what is intended to be measured.

Vendor
An organization with expertise in fielding patient surveys that handles all aspects of survey data collection on behalf of its health care organization client.
Visit Survey

The CG-CAHPS survey was developed initially to ask patients about their experiences in the last 12 months. Based on feedback from users of the surveys, the CAHPS Team developed a questionnaire that measures the experiences of patients during a single visit rather than over a period of time. The visit survey frames questions about communication and office staff interactions in terms of the most recent visit and questions about access over the last 12 months.

Web Completion

A survey return method that allows the respondent to complete the survey online. Web returns can be used as an option with both mail and email administration methods.