



**Methodology Report**  
**U.S. News & World Report**  
**2016-17 Nursing Home Finder**

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## **Background**

The U.S. News & World Report Nursing Home Finder is a decision tool intended to help consumers in search of a residential facility for themselves or a family member who needs temporary or long-term skilled nursing care.

That such a tool is needed is evidenced by the number of Americans who spend time in a nursing home, sometimes for just a few days while they rehabilitate from a hospital stay but often for years, until they die. On any given day, an estimated 1.4 million people reside in the nearly 16,000 nursing homes that operate in the U.S. Among those in the U.S. population who are 85 and older, 1 in 10 is a nursing-home resident.

Credible ratings can provide consumers with a good starting point for choosing a nursing home, but higher-rated homes are not always the best choice. In-depth visits are vital.

U.S. News began publishing online ratings of nursing homes in 2009. Until the current release, the tool reflected a snapshot of star ratings posted on Nursing Home Compare (<https://www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare>), the consumer website administered by the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, or CMS. CMS assigns an overall rating of one to five stars to nursing homes according to their performance in three areas, or domains – state-conducted health inspections, nurse staffing and medical quality measures. Homes also receive CMS star ratings in each domain.

## **2016-17 methodology changes and eligibility for ratings**

Effective for 2016-17, U.S. News elected to modify the CMS ratings approach. This reflects a decision 1) to evaluate a nursing home's performance over time, by averaging monthly data over a year, 2) to place more emphasis on strong performance in medical quality measures by capping overall star ratings of homes with a low rating in this domain and 3) to ensure that highly rated homes provided more than the required minimum of rehabilitation therapy to residents who were classified as having received high levels of rehabilitative services.

Nursing Home Finder profiles each of the nearly 16,000 U.S. skilled nursing facilities that appeared in October 2016<sup>1</sup> data posted by CMS. All of those homes accepted residents covered by Medicare, Medicaid or both.

To be rated by U.S. News, a facility had to receive an overall star rating from CMS for October 2016. Nursing Home Finder profiles of facilities that did not receive a CMS rating for October 2016 are displayed only with their demographic and structural information. Nursing homes that did not appear in the CMS data for October 2016 are not displayed on Nursing Home Finder, even if their CMS data was included in a prior or subsequent month.

Facilities that had an overall CMS rating in October 2016 were eligible for U.S. News ratings even if they lacked CMS ratings for one or more of the 12 months in the U.S. News analytic period (November 2015-October 2016). In all, 15,506 nursing homes received U.S. News ratings.

## Calculation of U.S. News star ratings

U.S. News evaluated the 15,506 nursing homes by averaging each one's CMS overall and domain star ratings across the 12-month analytic period. For all months in which a facility received overall and individual domain ratings, the overall ratings were summed and divided by the number of monthly ratings to obtain an average, which was then rounded down to the nearest 0.1 star. Calculation of the average overall rating was independent of domain star ratings, which were also averaged and displayed by U.S. News to inform consumers. Where appropriate, overall rating caps were applied as an additional step.

As discussed above, U.S. News imposed caps on overall star ratings as follows:

1. ***A nursing home's overall star rating by U.S. News was capped at 4 stars if any of the following conditions applied during the reporting period:***
  - The home received an overall CMS rating of 3 stars or less in any month.
  - The home received a CMS rating of 2 stars or less in health inspections or nurse staffing in any month.
  - The home was not rated by CMS (i.e., a rating was missing) in medical quality measures or staffing in a month in which it received an overall CMS rating.

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<sup>1</sup> Nursing homes file data on the 1st date of every month that represent data from the previous month. For example, October 2016 data pertain to information from September and were filed October 1.

- 1) The home treated patients with “very high” or “ultra-high” rehabilitation therapy, as defined by CMS for reimbursement purposes. 2) Of these patients, 95 percent or more in either or both groups received no more than 10 minutes per week of therapy above the minimum amount required to qualify for that reimbursement category.
- 2. *A nursing home’s overall star rating by U.S. News was capped at 3 stars if in any month during the 12-month period of analysis the home received a CMS rating of 2 stars or less in medical quality measures.*
- 3. *A nursing home’s average 12-month medical quality measures star rating was capped at 4 if the home’s overall rating was limited under the rehabilitation services cap (above).*

## **Best Nursing Homes recognition and online presentation**

U.S. News recognized as Best Nursing Homes those facilities with overall ratings of 4½ stars or greater, based on the methods described above. For 2016-17, 2,005 nursing homes earned this recognition. Their profiles on usnews.com display a badge indicating they are Best Nursing Homes.

Within a given state or city, Nursing Home Finder displays facilities in order by overall star rating, with higher-rated facilities appearing first. Homes with insufficient data to receive an overall rating are listed below one-star homes. Homes with the same star rating are ordered alphabetically or by distance depending on the search parameter. State and major metro area searches are sorted alphabetically. Zip Code searches and searches in smaller cities are sorted by the distance from the geographic center of the Zip Code or city.

## **Domain details**

An overall star rating from CMS is based on three elements or domains: state-conducted health inspections, nurse staffing and medical quality measures. CMS assigns a star rating to each domain. The domains are as follows:

**Health inspections.** Nearly all nursing homes accept Medicare, Medicaid or both. They are therefore regulated by the federal government and by the states in which they operate. States conduct health inspections of nursing homes on behalf of CMS every 12 to 15 months. Inspections identify deficiencies in matters such as safe food preparation, adequate infection control, [medication management](#), residents' rights, their quality of life, and proper skin care.

A home's star rating in this domain depends on the seriousness and scope of the deficiencies found – the degree of risk they pose and the relative number of residents who were or could have been harmed. The star rating is based on the three most recent health inspections as well as findings from complaints over the most recent three years from residents, their families and other members of the public. State inspectors also check for compliance with fire safety rules, although their findings do not factor into CMS or U.S. News star ratings. Nursing Home Finder displays results from all of the health inspections and fire inspections online.

**Nurse staffing.** CMS rates nursing homes on how many minutes of nursing care patients receive daily, based on data self-reported to CMS by each home. Facilities report the average number of registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, licensed vocational nurses and certified nurse aides and assistants on the payroll during the two weeks preceding the latest health inspection. The number of hours worked is also reported. Agency-provided temporary employees do not count in calculating nurse staffing.

The totals are compared with the average number of residents during the same period and arithmetic analysis determines the average number of daily minutes of nursing time. To receive five stars in the CMS ratings used by U.S. News, a home's nursing staff had to provide nearly 4½ hours of care a day to each resident, including approximately 43 minutes of care from registered nurses.

A twelve-month average, calculated by U.S. News, for each home is displayed on Nursing Home Finder. CMS provides the average number of minutes spent by physical therapists with residents providing rehabilitation therapy, which is not factored into the staffing rating but is displayed on [usnews.com](#).

**Medical quality measures.** CMS requires nursing homes to submit a combination of self-reported and claims-based medical data for the latest four calendar quarters – 24 short-stay and long-stay indicators that cover all Medicare and Medicaid residents. Short-stay indicators apply to stays of fewer than 100 days; long-stay indicators apply to stays of 100 days or more. CMS quality measure star ratings are based on data from a subset of nine long-stay and seven short-stay

indicators considered the most valid and reliable. Nursing Home Finder displays all 24 indicators. The 16 quality measures in the subset are listed following this section. Similar to the overall rating average, the U.S. News 12-month quality measure average was capped at 4 if 95 percent of patients receiving very high or ultra-high therapy received no more than 10 minutes per week of therapy above the minimum amount required to qualify for that reimbursement category.

**Rehabilitation therapy minutes.** U.S. News used two additional quality measures, both related to rehabilitation therapy, in the methodology described above. In March 2016, CMS for the first time released facility-level data on nursing homes' utilization of rehabilitation therapy. The data release followed a Wall Street Journal [investigation](#) that raised concerns about potentially inappropriate use of rehabilitation therapy by certain nursing homes. While CMS does not factor rehabilitation therapy data in its star ratings, U.S. News elected to incorporate the newly available data into our methodology, as described above, for calculating facilities' overall and medical quality measure ratings. Our rationale was [published](#) soon after CMS' data release (see <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/blogs/second-opinion/articles/2016-03-18/tying-our-nursing-home-ratings-to-overuse-of-rehabilitation>).

In addition to incorporating the rehabilitation data into its star ratings, U.S. News also published two measures of rehabilitation utilization data on each facility's usnews.com profile, along with other medical quality measures.

### **Short-stay quality measures**

#### **Self-reported:**

- Percentage of residents whose physical function improved from admission to discharge
- Percentage of residents with new or worsened pressure ulcers (bed sores)
- Percentage of residents who reported moderate to severe pain
- Percentage of residents who newly received an antipsychotic medication

#### **Claims-based:**

- Percentage of residents who were rehospitalized after a nursing-home admission
- Percentage of residents who had an outpatient emergency department visit
- Percentage of residents successfully discharged to the community

### **Long-stay quality measures**

#### **All are self-reported.**

- Percentage of residents whose ability to move independently worsened
- Percentage of residents needing increasing help with activities of daily living
- Percentage of high-risk residents with pressure ulcers
- Percentage of residents who have or had a catheter inserted and left in their bladder
- Percentage of residents who were physically restrained
- Percentage of residents with a urinary tract infection
- Percentage of residents who self-reported moderate to severe pain

- Percentage of residents who experienced one or more falls with major injury
- Percentage of residents who received an antipsychotic medication

**Rehabilitation measures**

**Both are claims-based.**

- Percentage of patients who received very-high rehabilitation therapy but only within 10 minutes of the minimum required by the government
- Percentage of patients who received ultra-high rehabilitation therapy but only within 10 minutes of the minimum required by the government