



August 6, 2021

**FIRMS INTERESTED IN BECOMING NCQA-CERTIFIED HEDIS<sup>®1</sup>SURVEY VENDORS:**

Thank you for your interest in NCQA's HEDIS Survey Vendor Certification Program. The proposal deadline for 2022 Certification, *HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures* has passed.

The RFP for HEDIS MY 2022 will be posted on this site in the summer of 2022. If you would like the RFP e-mailed to you when it becomes available next summer, please send your contact information to [CAHPS@ncqa.org](mailto:CAHPS@ncqa.org).

No information about HEDIS MY 2021 data collection and submission is presently available. The RFP for HEDIS MY 2021 is presented here solely to give interested firms general information about NCQA's Survey Vendor Certification Program. While the Survey Vendor Certification Program usually has only minor changes from one year to the next, there is no guarantee that any of the information provided in the HEDIS MY 2021 RFP will apply to NCQA's Survey Vendor Certification Program for HEDIS MY 2022.

<sup>1</sup> HEDIS is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**  
**IMPLEMENTATION OF HEDIS MY 2021 SURVEY MEASURES**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Contents**

I.	PURPOSE .....	2
II.	BACKGROUND.....	2
III.	SURVEY VENDOR CRITERIA.....	3
	A. Survey Vendor Capacity.....	3
	B. Relevant Survey Experience.....	4
IV.	SUREVEY PROCESS .....	5
	A. Sampling.....	5
	B. Data Collection .....	5
	C. Data Submission .....	7
	D. Quality Control .....	7
	E. Survey Vendor Reports.....	8
	G. Survey Vendor Oversight .....	9
V.	SUMMARY of terms of NCQA Survey Vendor Certification.....	9
VI.	TECHNICAL PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA (100 Points).....	10
VII.	TECHNICAL PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS .....	12
	EXHIBIT 1.....	14
	NCQA Survey Vendor Policies and Procedures.....	14
	A. Monitoring Performance.....	14
	D. Survey Vendor Grievance Procedures .....	15
	E. Marketing/Advertising Guidelines.....	15
	F. Code of Professional Conduct for NCQA-Certified Organizations .....	15
	H. Revisions to Policies and Procedures .....	17
	EXHIBIT 2.....	18
	Guidelines for Marketing and Advertising NCQA Survey Vendor Certification .....	18
	EXHIBIT 3.....	22
	Survey Vendor Certification Program Pricing.....	22

# HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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## I. PURPOSE

This request for proposal (RFP) covers tasks necessary to produce Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) survey results using the CAHPS<sup>®1</sup> 5.1H adult and child surveys for health plans with HEDIS protocols.

NCQA developed its Survey Vendor Certification program to promote standardization of data collected by multiple survey vendors, thereby ensuring comparability of results across health plans. To become an NCQA-Certified HEDIS Survey Vendor, an organization must demonstrate that it has the capability, experience and expert personnel to collect and report accurate survey results. This RFP contains information for prospective survey vendors to assess their capacity for administering HEDIS surveys.

NCQA trains and certify survey vendors to collect HEDIS survey results per the HEDIS protocols. Following certification, survey vendors enter into contracts with health plans to survey a sample of members. Within 24 months of receiving its initial certified survey vendor status, a survey vendor must successfully submit at least one HEDIS Survey sample to NCQA. A survey vendor must continue to submit at least one HEDIS Survey sample annually following the initial 24-month period.

*Note: The NCQA Survey Vendor Certification program discussed in this RFP certifies survey vendors to conduct the HEDIS Health Plan version of the CAHPS survey only. This is not related to any CMS survey reporting requirements programs.*

## II. BACKGROUND

NCQA's HEDIS is the premier tool for monitoring the quality of health plan care. HEDIS was developed through a partnership between NCQA and public and private organizations representing health care consumers and purchasers, health plans and health care services researchers. Individuals representing these interests serve on NCQA's Committee on Performance Measurement, which oversees the evolution of HEDIS.

HEDIS publication titles refer to the HEDIS measurement year: **HEDIS Measurement Year [Year]** is shortened to "**HEDIS MY [Year]**." NCQA will publish *HEDIS MY 2021, Volume 3: Specifications for Survey Measures ("Specifications")* on September 15, 2021.

The *Specifications* are comprised of surveys and protocols for the CAHPS 5.1H Health Plan surveys. The CAHPS surveys capture consumer information about experiences with care—during the past year for commercial plans and during the past six months for Medicaid plans. Health plans report survey results to NCQA as part of HEDIS data collection. NCQA uses survey results to inform accreditation decisions and to create national benchmarks for care. Health plans also collect HEDIS survey data for internal quality improvement.

Survey vendors will collect and report HEDIS MY 2021 data January through May 2022. The CAHPS surveys collect data for sampled adult and child Medicaid beneficiaries and for sampled adults and

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<sup>1</sup> CAHPS<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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children with commercial health plan coverage. A version of the child survey incorporates a measurement set to assess experience of care for children with chronic conditions (CCC survey).

There are four versions of the survey:

- CAHPS 5.1H Health Plan survey, adult commercial
- CAHPS 5.1H Health Plan survey, adult Medicaid
- CAHPS 5.1H Health Plan survey, child Medicaid
- CAHPS 5.1H Health Plan survey, child Medicaid, Children with Chronic Conditions

Survey questions are worded to be understood by a broad range of consumers. Some questions combine to form composites about key areas of care and service. These composites provide summary results that are easier for consumers and purchasers to interpret. CAHPS questions have been tested and shown to distinguish comparative performance between health plans and provide comparable results across populations.

The adult commercial survey has approximately 43 questions. The adult Medicaid survey has 40 questions. The child survey (without CCC) has 41 questions. The child Medicaid CCC survey has 76 questions. Survey vendors may include supplemental questions at the end of the survey. Survey vendors must submit proposed supplemental questions to NCQA for review and approval prior to fielding. NCQA does not collect data related to supplemental items.

Approximately 560 health plans reported HEDIS survey results for MY 2020, which covers approximately 1,080 adult and child survey samples for the commercial and Medicaid product lines and reporting products (e.g., HMO, POS, PPO).

### III. SURVEY VENDOR CRITERIA

Applicant organizations must meet minimum established criteria to be considered for NCQA-certification. NCQA promotes standardized data collection to facilitate valid comparative plan performance. The *Specifications* include requirements for reproducing and mailing questionnaires, providing adequate interviewing capacity at a telephone facility, collecting and processing data, calculating survey results, producing reports and performing other tasks NCQA deems necessary to qualify as a survey vendor. Survey vendors have the capacity to administer large-scale questionnaire mailings and to conduct follow-up telephone interviews using electronic telephone interviewing systems. Survey vendors may subcontract components of the survey administration process if they can document that there is sufficient oversight of the quality of services provided by subcontractors. Obtaining the sample frame from a client health plan, developing a sample in accordance with the *Specifications*, preparing the final data file and submitting the data file are activities that may **not** be subcontracted.

#### A. Survey Vendor Capacity

Survey vendors must have sufficient physical and personnel resources to administer large-scale outbound and inbound mail surveys and to conduct telephone interviews using an electronic telephone interviewing system during the specified survey fielding time-period. Survey vendors provide trained personnel who can answer questions pertaining to survey completion or legitimacy and maintain a toll-

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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free telephone number that is accessible weekdays from 9:00 a.m.—8:00 p.m. (survey vendor local time).

Survey vendors must have a commercial physical plant. Organizations conduct all survey-related work, including mail administration activities and telephone interviewing at their or their approved subcontractor's official business location. NCQA does not certify survey vendors, nor subcontractors, which operate from a residence. Prospective survey vendors must include plans to conduct any portion of survey operations from a location other than their official business location in their proposal. NCQA will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis.

Survey vendors must use an automated survey management system to track each survey record through each step of the administration process including sampling; outbound mailing and receipt of completed questionnaires; telephone interviewing; and storing entered survey data. Survey vendors provide detailed documentation of the survey management system in a Quality Assurance Plan (QAP) (refer to Section E—*Survey Vendor Reports*).

Survey vendors must be able to record telephone interviews conducted with health plan members and retain these recordings through December 31 of the survey-reporting year. Survey vendors store electronic images of mailed surveys as received for three years.

### **B. Relevant Survey Experience**

Survey vendors must have prior experience in fielding patient experience surveys using a mixed mode (mail/telephone) administration using a statistical sampling process within the most recent three-year period as an organization. Sampling must be done by a staff member who is directly employed by the survey vendor, (i.e., not subcontractors). Survey vendors have a designated Project Director, Project Manager and Sampling Manager who are directly employed by the survey vendor (i.e., not subcontractors), having at least two years of experience in overseeing all functional aspects of survey operations including mail, telephone, sampling, data file preparation, data file submission and data security.

Reliability, confidentiality and comparability of data are the priority of the data collection protocols. Survey vendors protect the confidentiality of sampled members when handling and processing member information during each phase of survey administration. Survey vendors have documented policies and procedures for protecting patient confidentiality. Survey vendors may only transmit or receive PHI via a secure file transfer protocol. Survey vendors encrypt files containing PHI.

Survey vendors must have established electronic security procedures related to access levels, passwords and firewalls as required by HIPAA. Survey vendors perform regular data back-ups and have off-site redundancy procedures that adequately safeguard system data.

Survey vendors have prior experience submitting member-level data electronically to an external third party.

### IV. SURVEY PROCESS

NCQA-trained and certified survey vendors assume responsibility for survey material preparation, survey sampling, data collection, processing and submission. The following provides a broad overview of the HEDIS Survey process.

#### A. Sampling

NCQA-Certified survey vendors receive a survey sample frame from their health plan clients. Health plans contract with an NCQA-Licensed HEDIS Compliance Organization or an NCQA-Certified HEDIS Compliance Auditor to validate their sample frame. Certified survey vendors also conduct quality checks on sample frame files received from health plans to verify accuracy and completeness of the provided information.

Survey vendors draw a systematic sample by following the systematic sampling instructions and formulas in the *Specifications* to create a reproducible sample of members selected from a single pass through the sample frame (where all members have an opportunity to be selected).

For each survey project administered, the survey vendor draws a systematic sample of members, employing the required sample sizes shown in the table below. In a health plan with fewer eligible members than the required sample size, the sample includes the health plan's entire eligible population.

#### *Sample Sizes for MY 2021 Survey Administration*

Survey Type	Required Sample Size
Adult Commercial	1,100
Adult Medicaid	1,350
Child Medicaid	1,650

The survey vendor is responsible for ensuring accurate addresses and telephone numbers for all members and proposes methods for determining whether addresses and telephone numbers are accurate.

#### B. Data Collection

NCQA supplies electronic versions of the mail and telephone surveys and instructions for formatting each questionnaire before Survey Vendor Training. Survey vendors will format mail and telephone questionnaires in accordance with instructions and will customize and reproduce the appropriate number of questionnaires with each health plan's name. Survey vendors send all mailings first class and use postal bar coding. NCQA must approve all mail survey materials before bulk printing and mailing.

Survey vendors conduct data collection for a sample of commercial or Medicaid health plan members as delineated in the *Specifications*. The health plan and survey vendor select one of two standard options for administering the survey:

1. The **mail-only methodology**, a five-wave mail protocol with three questionnaire mailings and two reminder postcards.
2. The **mixed methodology**, a four-wave mail protocol (two questionnaires) with telephone follow-up of a minimum of three and maximum of six telephone attempts.

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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The following summarizes the time-frame for the two protocol options:

### ***Mail-Only Methodology***

Task	Time Frame
Send first questionnaire and first cover letter to the sampled member.	0 days
Send a first postcard reminder to nonrespondents 4-10 days after mailing the first questionnaire.	4-10 days
Send second questionnaire and second cover letter to nonrespondents approximately 35 days after mailing the first questionnaire.	35 days
Send a second postcard reminder to nonrespondents 4-10 days after mailing the second questionnaire.	39-45 days
Send third questionnaire and third cover letter to nonrespondents approximately 25 days after mailing the second questionnaire.	60 days
Allow at least 21 days for the third questionnaire to be returned by the sampled member.	81 days

### ***Mixed Methodology***

Task	Time Frame
Send first questionnaire and first cover letter to the member.	0 days
Send a first postcard reminder to nonrespondents 4-10 days after mailing the first questionnaire.	4-10 days
Send second questionnaire and second cover letter to nonrespondents approximately 35 days after mailing the first questionnaire.	35 days
Send a second postcard reminder to nonrespondents 4-10 days after mailing the second questionnaire.	39-45 days
Initiate electronic telephone interviewing for nonrespondents approximately 21 days after mailing the second questionnaire.	56 days
Initiate systematic contact for all nonrespondents so that 3-6 telephone calls are attempted at different times of day, on different days of the week and in different weeks between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. (member local time).	56–70 days
Complete telephone follow-up sequence (completed interviews obtained or maximum calls reached for all nonrespondents) approximately 14 days after initiation.	70 days

The *Specifications* provide complete details of HEDIS Survey data collection protocols. The following summarizes basic data collection tasks:

1. NCQA provides the questionnaire and text for the introductory letters ~~email invitations~~ and postcards. Survey vendors insert their name and the health plan name in the letters, envelopes, email invitations and postcards.
2. Survey vendors reproduce enough questionnaires to support two mailings (or three mailings, if using the mail-only methodology) to sampled members. Survey vendors are responsible for all reproduction activities and for first-class mail and business-reply envelopes.

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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3. Survey vendors print and send the first questionnaire and a cover letter with message content, design and format determined by NCQA.
4. Four to ten days after the first questionnaire is mailed, survey vendors mail a reminder postcard, with message content, design and format determined by NCQA.
5. Thirty-five days after the first survey is mailed, survey vendors mail a second questionnaire and cover letter to nonrespondents. The cover letter sent with this questionnaire will differ from that sent with the first mailing, with message content, design and format determined by NCQA.
6. Four to ten days after the second questionnaire is mailed, survey vendors mail a reminder postcard, with message content, design and format determined by NCQA.
7. For the mail-only methodology, 60 days after the first questionnaire is mailed, survey vendors mail a third questionnaire with cover letter. The cover letter sent with this questionnaire will be the same as that sent with the second questionnaire.
8. For the mixed methodology (mail with telephone follow-up), survey vendors program electronic telephone interviewing systems in accordance with specifications provided by NCQA. Survey vendors obtain telephone numbers for all sampled members who have not replied by mail, in sufficient time to begin telephone follow-up 21 days after the second questionnaire is sent. Survey vendors may obtain telephone numbers from member lists supplied by health plans. However, survey vendors must propose alternative methods for obtaining missing telephone numbers and for verifying the telephone numbers supplied by health plans. Survey vendors use telephone search methods to obtain and verify respondent telephone numbers. Survey vendors will attempt at least three calls, but no more than six calls, in order to reach each potential respondent.
9. Survey vendors scan or key-enter data providing 100% verification as specified in the NCQA Quality Assurance Plan for HEDIS Survey Measures and assign a disposition code to each sampled member, which will be used to track and report whether the member has completed the survey or needs follow-up contact, as described in the Specifications.

**Onsite Data Collection.** NCQA does not allow data collection at the health plan, practice, or hospital site.

**Incentives and Proxy Responses.** NCQA does not allow health plans or survey vendors to use incentives of any kind. The intent for the adult survey is that sampled members complete their own survey. NCQA does not allow proxy responses for the adult survey. Either a parent or a caretaker who is familiar with the sampled child's health care may complete the child survey.

### **C. Data Submission**

Survey vendors electronically submit member-level data to NCQA using a CSV file format prescribed by NCQA. NCQA computes the summary-level data and composite scores and returns these reports to survey vendors. In early June, health plans review and attest to the accuracy of data files, and determine whether to publicly report data.

### **D. Quality Control**

Survey vendors report detailed quality control procedures for this project in a QAP in Report 1 (refer to *Section E—Survey Vendor Reports*). Survey vendors arrange and document quality control procedures for survey implementation, including, but not limited to training of staff and subcontractors involved in



## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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survey operations; printing, mailing and recording receipt of mail surveys; conducting telephone survey administration; providing customer support; processing, coding and editing data; calculating response rates; and preparing reports. Survey vendors are responsible for quality oversight of all work performed by subcontractors.

### E. Survey Vendor Reports

**Survey Vendor Quality Assurance Plan.** The Survey Vendor QAP details the organization’s background, structure, and staff experience, survey resources, confidentiality processes and security practices, the survey administration system, data collection methodology and quality control practices.

**Report 1.** Contains the survey vendor’s Special Topic Report which details a key aspect of survey administration (e.g., project staffing and subcontractor management, data security, sampling); NCQA will specify the topic for the Special Topic Report annually.

It is important that sufficient detail is provided in the QAP and Special Topic Report so that NCQA can determine the survey vendor’s process, adherence to survey administration guidelines and have documentation that rigorous quality checks and controls are in place.

**Report 2.** Documents the survey administration year, problems with data collection, if any, and suggests process improvements for future survey administration cycles.

Submission of this report is due at the end of data submission. Sample fees are due shortly afterwards (refer to *Exhibit 3: Survey Vendor Certification Program Pricing Structure*).

Survey vendors submit reports to NCQA via e-mail.

### F. HEDIS MY 2021 Survey Administration Timeline

Basic Survey Vendor Tasks	2021 Timeline
Remit Training Fee	Wednesday, September 22
Attend New Survey Vendor Training via Webinar	Wednesday, September 29
Submit Survey Vendor QAP to NCQA	Friday, October 22
Submit Report 1 to NCQA	Friday, October 22
Remit Certification fee	Monday, November 1
Begin contracting with health plans for survey administration	November – December
Health Plan and Certified Auditor Tasks	2022 Timeline
Health plans create sample frames by following age and continuous enrollment criteria (member addresses and telephone numbers updated by health plan)	January
Auditors validate sample frame creation for accuracy	January
Health plans provide clean and audited sample frames to survey vendors	January

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

Basic Survey Vendor Tasks	2022 Timeline
Draw sample(s)	January – February
Create mail surveys, add supplemental questions requested by health plan clients and send to NCQA for approval	No later than January
Survey vendors begin administration	Mid-February
Submit member-level data to NCQA	Monday, May 2 – Wednesday, May 25

Basic Survey Vendor Tasks	2022 Timeline
NCQA provides calculated survey results to health plans; health plans sign attestations.	Friday June 3 – Wednesday, June 15
Submit Report 2 to NCQA	Friday, June 24
Remit sample fees	Wednesday, July 13

### G. Survey Vendor Oversight

NCQA applies an oversight process which includes activities before, during, and after survey administration. Certified survey vendors comply with all NCQA-published protocols for survey administration, i.e., the *Specifications* and *NCQA Quality Assurance Plan for HEDIS Survey Measures*. NCQA reviews printed materials, supplemental questions and telephone interviewing scripts prior to survey fielding. During survey fielding, NCQA conducts silent monitoring of surveys administered via electronic telephone interviewing. Following survey administration, NCQA conducts a retrospective data review. NCQA will request survey vendors to submit a sample of electronic images of mail surveys and telephone interview recordings to NCQA for review.

In the event of a discrepancy from the HEDIS protocol during survey fielding, survey vendors notify NCQA or request permission from NCQA to deviate from HEDIS protocols.

### V. SUMMARY OF TERMS OF NCQA SURVEY VENDOR CERTIFICATION

1. Minimally, the survey vendor Project Director and Project Manager must attend New Survey Vendor Training and Update Survey Vendor Training.
2. Upon successful completion of training, survey vendors sign an Agreement for Survey Vendor Certification with NCQA.
3. Survey vendors must carry at least \$2 million in general liability insurance.
4. The term for NCQA HEDIS Survey Vendor Certification is one year.
5. Survey vendors follow the survey methodology as detailed in *HEDIS MY 2021, Volume 3: Specifications for Survey Measures*.
6. Survey vendors follow NCQA Survey Vendor Policies and Procedures (Exhibit 1).
7. Survey vendors follow the NCQA Guidelines for Marketing and Advertising (Exhibit 2).
8. Survey vendors submit Survey Vendor QAP to NCQA.

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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9. Certified survey vendors follow the survey process specified and comply with all quality oversight requirements described in the NCQA Quality Assurance Plan for HEDIS Survey Measures.
10. Certified survey vendors submit Report 1 and Report 2 to NCQA.
11. Survey vendors assume primary responsibility for all survey tasks conducted by a subcontractor and shall be responsible for performing and providing written evidence of a quality oversight process for any work performed by a subcontractor, as specified by NCQA.
12. NCQA reserves the right to rescind certification from a survey vendor at any time for cause (e.g., concerns about the quality of data collection and delivery, or safeguarding of member confidentiality.)
13. Within 24 months of receiving its initial certified survey vendor status, a survey vendor must successfully submit at least one HEDIS CAHPS Survey sample to NCQA. A survey vendor must continue to submit at least one HEDIS CAHPS Survey sample annually following the initial 24-month period.

### VI. TECHNICAL PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA (100 Points)

NCQA uses the following criteria and weights in the technical evaluation of proposals that comply with the minimum requirements. HEDIS Survey Vendor Certification is for administration of the CAHPS 5.1H Health Plan Survey, commercial and Medicaid.

#### Relevant Survey Experience (20 points)

NCQA reviews offerors' technical competence and experience in running large-scale patient experience survey research operations. Offerors must demonstrate that they have conducted similar scale efforts within the most recent three-year period. Specific attention will be paid to offerors' prior experience conducting mixed mode (mail with telephone follow-up) survey protocols; submitting patient experience survey data to an external third-party organization; employing a statistical sampling process in conducting past or current survey projects; and offerors' experience with primary client management.

#### Organizational Capacity (25 points)

NCQA reviews offerors' capacity to execute this project effectively, including access to requisite resources and staff. Depending on the number of health plans that contract with a survey vendor, the potential mail processing volume and number of telephone interviews conducted could be significant. NCQA strongly considers an offeror's capacity to handle a large volume of mail questionnaires and to conduct highly-standardized electronic telephone interviews in a short time frame. Proposals will include a description of the secure physical facilities available for conducting this project and protecting individual health plan member information, including IT infrastructure, mailing and telephone survey capacity, electronic telephone interviewing software with the capacity for remote monitoring and the creation of a toll-free customer support line. Offerors must demonstrate that the applicant organization and its subcontractors, if applicable, conduct all business operations from a commercial business address and maintain an associated secure physical plant where all work related to the collection and submission of HEDIS survey data will be performed. Home-based or virtual organizations will not be considered. If

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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employing a mixed (mail with telephone follow-up) protocol, the use of home-based telephone interviewers will not be considered as qualifying toward meeting criteria.

Offerors will present, clearly and concisely, how the work will be performed to ensure that the protocol timeline is met. Offerors will indicate the maximum number of surveys that they propose to conduct and will provide detailed documentation of their capacity to handle the proposed volume of surveys.

### Quality Control/Management Plan (30 points)

NCQA reviews proposals for a thorough approach to project management and quality assurance processes for ensuring high-quality data through each stage of the data collection process. Offerors will demonstrate the capacity for and the nature of the quality control mechanisms that will ensure an adequate response rate for the proposed survey protocol. Offerors must demonstrate the ability to implement an intensive work plan for data collection and describe how their organization performs quality checks on both their own and all subcontractors' work. Offerors must describe their process for conducting quality checks on sample frame files received from health plan clients to verify accuracy and completeness of sample frame information. Offerors must state how electronic data and returned mail paper questionnaires will be protected and stored to ensure patient confidentiality. Offerors must describe their physical and electronic data security protocols for receiving, processing and storing printed and electronic versions of questionnaires and sample files that protect the confidentiality of patient response data and personal identifying information, including, but not limited to, their established process for electronic security procedures related to access levels, passwords and firewalls and for identifying and reporting breaches of confidential data.

### Personnel (10 points)

NCQA considers the organization's relevant background and experience of key staff, including the Project Director, Project Manager and staff members who will directly supervise the survey work. Proposals will describe staff available to conduct the chosen survey protocol. Offerors must directly employ key staff, who must have strong backgrounds in survey research and methodology and previous experience using specified modes of administration. The offeror's designated Project Manager who oversees all survey operations must have at least two years of experience in overseeing all functional aspects of survey operations, including mail, telephone, data file preparation and data security. The offeror's designated Sampling Manager must have experience generating random sampling using statistical methods. Information Systems staff responsible for data submission (programmers) must be directly employed by the survey vendor and must have previous experience preparing and submitting data files to an external third-party organization within the past two years. Subcontracting of sampling, final data file preparation and data file submission will not be considered as meeting criteria. Offerors will indicate whether temporary staff needs to be hired to meet project goals as well as how temporary staff will be recruited and trained (if applicable). Offerors must indicate how the obligations of this project will be met, with consideration of its time frame and of competing obligations. Offerors must have appropriate organizational back-up staff for coverage of key staff.

### Past Performance (15 points)

NCQA reviews offerors' project-specific past performance in terms of capacity, experience and actual performance on work similar to that required under this RFP. Demonstrated evidence of the capacity to

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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field and complete all aspects of large-scale surveys (particularly the ability to do so under tight deadlines while achieving relatively high response rates) within the most recent three-year period is important. Prior experience with polling questions, qualitative data collection, surveys that did not use statistical sampling methods, Internet or Web-based surveys and Interactive-Voice Response surveys will not be considered as applicable past performance.

NCQA may request supporting documentation from applicant organizations. Proposals that do not comply with the minimum requirements outlined in this RFP will not be considered.

Survey vendor selection will be announced in mid-September 2021. Selected survey vendors will attend NCQA New Survey Vendor Training via webinar in September 2021 and will enter into a Certification Agreement with NCQA. Survey vendors may then contract with plans to perform surveys. The NCQA Web site will list contact information for those survey vendors selected to conduct surveys. Survey vendors bear responsibility for all training and certification costs.

### **VII. TECHNICAL PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS**

Applicant organizations indicate the maximum number of survey samples the survey vendor proposes to administer, given its organizational capacity and competing obligations, in their proposal.

- All proposals are confidential. Proposal specifications are as follows:
- A maximum of 40 pages of text.
- 12-point Times New Roman or 11-point Arial font, double-spaced.
- Page margins .75" all around.

Extensive appendices are discouraged. Any supporting materials other than CVs will be reviewed at the discretion of NCQA reviewers. *Proposals that merely restate the RFP will be considered nonresponses.* To facilitate proposal review and evaluation, proposals must be organized in the following format:

#### **Name/Contact Information of Primary Contact Person**

#### **Desired Sample Capacity**

#### **Executive Summary**

- I. Relevant Survey Experience**
- II. Organizational Capacity**
- III. Quality Control/Management Plan**
- IV. Personnel**
- V. Past performance**

Two NCQA staff members will review and score each proposal. There will be a third, independent reviewer in cases where these two primary scores diverge significantly.

NCQA may:

- Approve the proposal.
- Ask for revisions to the proposal.
- Request a more extensive proposal.
- Decline the proposal. *Declined proposals will not be reviewed.*

## EXHIBIT 1 NCQA SURVEY VENDOR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### A. Monitoring Performance

NCQA will perform retrospective review of sample files as described in the Additional Terms of Certification below. NCQA will also review original scanned images of mailed surveys and recordings of telephone interviews conducted by survey vendors as part of a primary source verification. Survey vendors are responsible to provide any and all information and materials to NCQA as required to assess vendors' performance of its duties. Failure to provide the information to NCQA for any reason is grounds for revocation of certification.

NCQA will have access to PHI for purposes of its assessment and review of survey vendors and the sample files. Survey vendors act in the role of business associates to health plans that are covered entities under HIPAA. NCQA is also a business associate to survey vendors and health plans for purposes of the quality assessment activities. Survey vendors are responsible for reserving the right to provide PHI to NCQA for these purposes. The parties' respective rights and responsibilities with respect to the use and/or disclosure of PHI are as set forth in the Certification Agreement, and as specifically described in Sections 20 through 26 to satisfy the requirements of 45 C.F.R. §§ 164.502(e)(1)(ii) and 164.308(b)(2), as applicable.

### B. Permissible Subcontracting

The following activities are eligible for subcontracting by certified survey vendors:

- Printing of survey materials including envelopes, questionnaires, and cover letters
- Outgoing mailing of survey packets
- Incoming receipt and data entry/scanning of returned mail surveys
- Telephone interviewing

Survey vendors provide evidence of their oversight process for each subcontracted activity through written documentation, including, but not limited to a description of internal process and procedures to check the accuracy of, and compliance with, established protocols of any subcontractor activities; internal reports providing evidence that oversight procedures of subcontractors were implemented and any corrective actions required to remediate subcontractor errors.

The following activities may not be subcontracted:

- Receipt of sample frame from client health plan
- Development of sample file
- Preparation of final data file
- Submission of data file to NCQA

Subcontracting the development of the sample file and preparation of the final data file is permissible if the delegation of this function is to an NCQA certified HEDIS survey vendor. Survey vendors remain responsible to provide evidence of their oversight process of subcontractors to an NCQA certified HEDIS survey vendor.

### C. Systems Resources

All survey-related work, including outgoing survey production, processing and scanning of incoming surveys, and telephone interviewing must be conducted at the survey vendor's or approved subcontractor's official commercial business location.

### D. Survey Vendor Grievance Procedures

Survey vendors are responsible for the conduct of employees with whom they employ. Survey vendors have a formal grievance procedure in place, which is communicated to health plans. Complaints against an employee's actions or conduct with respect to the survey process will be handled through the grievance process. If a plan is not satisfied with the outcome of a complaint, the vendor's procedure for the specific complaint and the complaint outcome will be forwarded to NCQA for review and investigation. A valid, substantiated complaint that is not resolved satisfactorily by the survey vendor may result in cancellation of the Certification Agreement. Vendors must inform NCQA of all unresolved grievances.

### E. Marketing/Advertising Guidelines

Refer to Exhibit B: *Marketing and Advertising Guidelines*.

### F. Code of Professional Conduct for NCQA-Certified Organizations

Each vendor applying for NCQA Certification must agree to the Code of Professional Conduct for NCQA-Certified Organizations.

In promoting high standards of ethical conduct, employees and subcontractors of the certified survey vendor will:

1. Avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest by:
  - Upholding the principle that a vendor may not produce survey results for a client or employer for which an employee or subcontractor of Vendor acts as a member of the audit team for the survey results.
  - Not servicing any private or special interest in fulfillment of the duties of vendor, thereby excluding, by definition, producing survey results for a client or employer that controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with the vendor.
  - Not accepting any inducement, commission, gift or any other benefit from clients or employers, their employees, or any interested party, or knowingly allowing employees and subcontractors to do so, other than payment of fees for performance of the HEDIS surveys.
  - Disclosing to any client or employer any relationships that influence, or give the appearance of influencing, survey results.
2. Conduct themselves professionally, with truth, accuracy, fairness and responsibility to clients.



## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

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3. Act as faithful agents for each employer and client.
4. Strive to enhance the prestige and competence of NCQA-Certified vendors.
5. Help employees develop survey skills.
6. Ensure that employees are credited for their work.
7. Not misrepresent any survey team member's qualifications, competence or experience, nor undertake survey work beyond their qualifications.
8. Maintain confidentiality of all information pertaining to the survey and not discuss or disclose any information unless authorized in writing by the plan and NCQA.
9. Not accept retainers, commissions or valuable consideration from any interested party in exchange for offering confidential information or disclosures related in any way to NCQA, clients, NCQA-Certified vendors or plans.
10. Not intentionally communicate false or misleading information that may compromise the integrity of any survey or any NCQA program.
11. Not participate in any practice for a client or employer that could contribute to bias in survey results.
12. Preface any public statements related to survey results that clearly indicate on whose behalf they are made.
13. Not accept compensation from more than one party for the same service, without the consent of all parties.
14. Not act in any way that would prejudice the reputation of NCQA and the survey results, and fully cooperate with an inquiry in the event of an alleged breach of this code.
15. Abide by the *Code of Professional Ethics and Practices* of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and the *Code of Standards and Ethics for Survey Research* of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO).

### G. Additional Terms of Certification

1. Within 24 months of receiving its initial certified survey vendor status, a survey vendor must successfully submit at least one HEDIS Survey sample to NCQA. A survey vendor must continue to submit at least one HEDIS Survey sample annually following the initial 24-month period.
2. Survey vendors must scan and retain electronic images of mail surveys and must not alter the images for three years. After three years they are destroyed. All images contained in a document must be available for retrieval when requested by NCQA.

## **HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures**

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3. Survey vendors must record telephone interviews conducted with health plan members for HEDIS Surveys and retain these recordings until December 31 of the survey reporting year. Survey vendors must provide these recording to NCQA, or its agent, upon request.

### **H. Revisions to Policies and Procedures**

At its sole discretion, NCQA may amend its Policies and Procedures, Grievance and Appeal Procedures or any other survey vendor certification program policy.

## EXHIBIT 2 GUIDELINES FOR MARKETING AND ADVERTISING NCQA SURVEY VENDOR CERTIFICATION

NCQA encourages survey vendors to publicize their achievement, and has developed the following Marketing and Advertising Guidelines toward that end. These guidelines explain how to market certification status and include appropriate language for incorporation into marketing and advertising materials, in addition to ideas for marketing.

Guidelines are designed to help create advertising and marketing materials that reference NCQA status clearly, factually and accurately; to protect the integrity of NCQA's programs; and to allow all participants to benefit from their achievement in a fair and accurate manner. The most recent version of these guidelines may be found on NCQA's Web site at [www.ncqa.org/marketing.aspx](http://www.ncqa.org/marketing.aspx).

### Marketing and Advertising Materials

References to the terms "advertising," "advertising materials" or "advertising and marketing materials" in this document encompass all external and internal communications, including, but not limited to:

- All printed materials.
- TV advertising.
- Radio advertising.
- Posters.
- Annual reports.
- Billboards.
- Press releases.
- Newsletters.
- Responses to RFPs.
- Responses to RFIs.
- HEDIS report cards.
- Durable products (e.g., mugs, t-shirts).
- Letters to employers.
- Letters to clinicians.
- Letters to plans.
- Letters to consumers.
- Letters to insurance brokers.
- Marketing and sales brochures.
- Web sites or other electronic materials.
- Any other promotional materials.

### Use of NCQA Logo

The use and reproduction of NCQA's logo is strictly prohibited. Certified survey vendors are prohibited from using the NCQA logo in any marketing and advertising materials, including Web sites, e-mails and other Web-based applications. Vendors that want to provide a link to NCQA's Web site should use [www.ncqa.org](http://www.ncqa.org).

### Use of Survey Vendor Certification Seals

- NCQA issues one certification seal to Certified Survey Vendors.
- Seals are provided in EPS and JPG formats.
- Seals may not be modified.
- Certification statuses can change, which may affect durable goods (e.g., a billboard that is no longer accurate must be corrected). Vendors must maintain and update marketing and promotional materials, and **must** cease distribution of all materials with incorrect status information. Updating of Web sites and other distributed materials should take place within 30 days of certification status change.

### How to Advertise NCQA Certification Status

- Survey vendors may not say they are the “exclusive” or “preferred” survey vendor for NCQA surveys.
- Survey vendors may not quote NCQA staff in their advertising materials.
- Survey vendors may not release NCQA communications in their advertising or marketing materials.
- Survey vendors may not engage in competitive advertising with other survey vendors.
- Survey vendors should clearly state that they have earned NCQA Certification (e.g., *Survey vendor X is NCQA Certified to conduct...*).

### Recommended Language

NCQA-Certified Survey Vendors may use the following statements, alone or in combination with other language, to identify or describe NCQA.

### *Descriptions of NCQA*

- NCQA is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving health care quality.
- NCQA is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to assessing and reporting on the quality of health plans, managed behavioral healthcare organizations, preferred provider organizations, physician organizations, credentials verification organizations, disease management programs and other health-related programs.
- NCQA is committed to providing information on the quality of health plans. Consumers can access information on NCQA or on health care quality on NCQA’s Web site at [www.ncqa.org](http://www.ncqa.org), or by calling NCQA Customer Support at 888-275-7585.
- NCQA is governed by a board of directors that includes employers, consumer and labor representatives, health plans, quality experts, regulators and representatives from organized medicine.
- NCQA’s mission is to improve the quality of health care.

### *CAHPS 5.1H Health Plan Surveys*

- Developed jointly by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and NCQA, the Consumer Assessment of Health Care Providers and Systems (CAHPS) is the most comprehensive tool available for assessing consumers’ experiences with their health plans.
- CAHPS<sup>®</sup> provides consumers, purchasers and health plans with information about a broad range of key consumer issues such as overall satisfaction, average wait times, physician availability, obstacles to receiving care and parents’ impressions of their children’s care.
- NCQA’s HEDIS Survey Vendor program was developed by NCQA to ensure standardization of data collection; thus, results from consumer experiences are comparable across health plans. To become an NCQA-Certified HEDIS Survey Vendor, an organization must demonstrate that it has the capability, experience and expert personnel to accurately administer the survey.
- The HEDIS survey provides a survey instrument that can be used by a broad variety of health systems to capture experiences from health care consumers.

### ***NCQA Trademarks***

#### **HEDIS®**

The Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS®) is a registered trademark of NCQA. The registered trademark symbol should be applied directly after the word “HEDIS.” The organization need only apply the trademark to the first reference of the term “HEDIS” within the written material. A footnote stating, “HEDIS® is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA),” should be placed at the bottom of the page where the registered trademark first appears.

#### **Quality Compass®**

Quality Compass is a registered trademark of NCQA. The registered trademark symbol should be applied directly after the word “Compass.” The organization need only apply the trademark to the first reference of the term “Quality Compass” within the written material. A footnote stating, “Quality Compass® is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA),” should be placed at the bottom of the page where the registered trademark first appears.

#### **NCQA HEDIS Compliance Audit™**

NCQA HEDIS Compliance Audit™ is a trademark of NCQA. The trademark symbol should be applied directly after the word “Audit.” The organization need only apply the trademark to the first reference of the term “NCQA HEDIS Compliance Audit” within the written material. A footnote stating, “NCQA HEDIS® Compliance Audit™ is a trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA),” should be placed at the bottom of the page where the trademark first appears.

#### **CAHPS®**

CAHPS® is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). The registered trademark symbol should be applied directly after the word “CAHPS®.” The organization need only apply the trademark to the first reference of the term “CAHPS” within the written material. A footnote stating, “CAHPS® is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ),” should be placed at the bottom of the page where the trademark first appears.

### ***Describing NCQA Data in a Press Release***

All of the preceding rules apply to press releases. Organizations may create press releases announcing their NCQA Certification status. Press releases should include a description of the survey from the language above and NCQA boilerplate language:

NCQA is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to improving health care quality. NCQA accredits and certifies a wide range of health care organizations. It also recognizes clinicians and practices in key areas of performance. NCQA is committed to providing health care quality information for consumers, purchasers, health care providers and researchers.

Contact [communications@ncqa.org](mailto:communications@ncqa.org) if you have questions about press releases.

### Compliance

Organizations must follow and conform to all applicable NCQA Marketing and Advertising Guidelines. Information referencing NCQA status or products must be accurate and not misleading. Only the organization that earned NCQA Certification may advertise the status and use the corresponding seal; affiliates, including delegated entities, contractors and partners, may not use the NCQA status and seal. Failure to comply with these guidelines may jeopardize certification status.

NCQA conducts periodic audits of marketing and advertising materials to ensure that they are true and are not misleading, and that NCQA status is represented correctly. Failure to participate in an NCQA audit or refusal to comply with NCQA's request to address inaccuracies in information related to NCQA, to NCQA status or to the product in marketing and advertising materials is a violation of NCQA's advertising guidelines and may result in revocation of NCQA status.

Organizations must maintain all copies of marketing and advertising materials referencing NCQA status and products released from September 15 of each year until December 31 of the following year (i.e., for a period of 15½ months).

NCQA reserves the right to require an organization to withdraw its advertising materials from distribution immediately or to publish, at the organization's cost, a retraction or clarification in connection with any false or misleading statements or any violation of applicable NCQA marketing and advertising guidelines. Organizations agree in advance to remedy violations with actions deemed appropriate by NCQA.

### Special Situations

These guidelines may not address all potential marketing and advertising materials. In such instances, contact the NCQA Marketing Department at [marketing@ncqa.org](mailto:marketing@ncqa.org).

NCQA will respond to complaints regarding inaccurate or misleading advertising materials by customers and their affiliates. Complaints may initiate an audit of an organization's materials outside the regular audit process.

**Thank you for observing these guidelines. If you have questions, please contact NCQA at [marketing@ncqa.org](mailto:marketing@ncqa.org).**

## HEDIS MY 2021 Implementation of Survey Measures

### EXHIBIT 3 SURVEY VENDOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAM PRICING

Fee	MY 2021 Pricing	Due
Training Fee	\$5,750	Wednesday, September 22, 2021
Certification Fee	\$8,000	Monday, November 1, 2021
CAHPS 5.1H Adult per Sample Fee	\$1,607	Wednesday, July 13, 2022
CAHPS 5.1H Child per Sample Fee	\$1,148	Wednesday, July 13, 2022
Late Reporting Fee	18% of outstanding balance annually (or 1.5% monthly).	
Resubmission Fee	Additional fees may be incurred if a resubmission due to survey vendor error is required after the data submission deadline has passed. See details below.	

- Training Fee: \$5,750. Nonrefundable. Covers training costs for survey vendor staff members to attend the October training seminar.
- Certification Fee: \$8,000. Nonrefundable. Paid after training; must accompany the signed Survey Vendor Certification contract.
- CAHPS 5.1H Adult per Sample Fee: \$1,607. Fees cover quality assurance, the data submission process, and the technical oversight that NCQA provides and calculation of survey results.
- CAHPS 5.1H Child per Sample Fee: \$1,148. Fees cover quality assurance, the data submission process, and the technical oversight that NCQA provides and calculation of survey results.
- Late Reporting Fee: 18% annually (or 1.5% monthly) on the outstanding balance of sample fees not paid on time or within one month after a survey is completed.
- Resubmission Fee: Survey vendors will incur a resubmission fee if a resubmission is requested after the data submission deadline and prior to the last business day of June. Resubmission fees are 3% over and above the sample fees in place for the current measurement year. NCQA, at its sole discretion, may choose to not accept late submissions or resubmission requests after the data submission deadline.