



**American Association  
of Homes and Services  
for the Aging**

**NEWS  
RELEASE**

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**Federal Nursing Home Quality Initiative**  
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Washington, D.C. – The federal government's nursing home quality initiative – launched in six states in April and scheduled for national launch in November – signals a new emphasis by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) on quality improvement in nursing home care.

The American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) supports the initiative. We welcome CMS' development of a technical assistance program to help nursing homes expand their quality improvement strategies, and we support disclosure of information to consumers that will help them make informed decisions.

There is still much to be learned about measuring quality and using that information to improve nursing home services. The federal initiative is a laudable step in that direction.

AAHSA encourages consumers to view the published measures and ratings as a starting point for asking further questions about a nursing home's quality of care. This process is similar, in fact, to the way many people make another important decision – choosing higher education for themselves or their children.

When evaluating colleges, families do not rely on a single set of test scores or published rankings, because numbers alone do not paint the entire picture of quality. Personal visits and information gathered from a variety of sources are equally as important in evaluating nursing homes.

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It is important, for example, to ask the older person's physician about the type of nursing home that would be most suitable. Then, ask around. What kind of reputation for care does the home have? What do doctors, clergy, and other families think of the home? Is the atmosphere clean, pleasant and inviting? Does the staff make you feel welcome? What kind of interaction do you see between the residents and staff? Is the staff open to answering all your questions?

Ask to see the nursing home's latest inspection report. Ask who sponsors or owns the facility. Ask to see a list of board members; are there local community leaders on the governing board? Ask who is the medical director; is he or she a skilled, respected member of the local medical community?

We must all get a lot smarter when it comes to nursing home care. As new care options have emerged for healthier seniors, nursing homes have the responsibility of caring for very frail older persons who require round-the-clock skilled care. That presents new challenges for nursing homes that are striving to provide quality care, for public policy makers who have a role in regulating nursing homes, and for consumers who are seeking the best facilities for their loved ones.

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Note to reporters: According to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the nursing home quality initiative national launch has these features:

- CMS has identified eight measures that are generally associated with indications of the quality of care a nursing home provides, for example, rates of bedsores and pain. Each quarter, updated information on these measures will be available to the public for each nursing home.
- This information was made available in late April for the six-state pilot program in Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington. The national launch is scheduled November 2002.
- As part of the CMS initiative, state quality improvement organizations are providing technical assistance programs to help nursing homes enhance quality in their facilities.
- CMS says that it will continue to make refinements to the Nursing Home Quality Initiative as the agency gathers more information about the quality measures and risk adjustment, and the public's use of this information.

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*The American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA) is committed to advancing the vision of healthy, affordable, ethical aging services for America. The association represents 5,600 mission-driven, not-for-profit nursing homes, continuing care retirement communities, assisted living and senior housing facilities, and community service organizations. Every day, AAHSA's members serve one million older persons across the country. AAHSA's Web site is [www.aahsa.org](http://www.aahsa.org).*