

COMPLIANCE CUE

CMS

CMS Revises Special Focus Facility (SFF) Program to Include Prevalence of Falls

BACKGROUND

The Special Focus Facility (SFF) Program is a long-standing CMS initiative designed to improve compliance and quality of care among the lowest-performing nursing homes. Facilities with an SFF designation face increased surveyor scrutiny and enhanced oversight during their path to improvement and risk being terminated from Medicare and/or Medicaid programs should satisfactory corrections not take place.

On January 28, 2026, CMS announced significant revisions via memo [QSO-23-01-NH](#), most notably shifting SFF Program selection criteria from staffing levels to *fall prevalence*.

The CMS focus on improving facility fall rates follows the recent [OIG Report](#), which claims that nursing homes failed to report 43% of falls with major injury and hospitalization among Medicare-enrolled residents. This underreporting of falls on resident assessments has raised concerns about the accuracy and reliability of the CMS Care Compare tool and driven the change in SFF inclusion criteria to now include fall prevalence.

SUMMARY OF REVISIONS

For SFF candidates identified through the two most recent standard health survey cycles and the last three years of complaint survey performance, CMS instructs State Agencies to, “consider the facility’s prevalence of falls when selecting SFFs from the list of candidates.”

The update to the Program’s “Selection Focus Area” **emphasizes using a facility’s falls prevalence data collected from MDS assessments to guide SFF selection, especially when candidate facilities have comparable inspection histories.** This marks a shift from previous guidance, where emphasis was placed on facility staffing ratios.

Providers of candidate facilities may access their site’s falls data within the Internet Quality Improvement and Evaluation System (iQIES), through the MDS 3.0 Facility-Level Quality Measure (QM) Report, located under the Quality Measure report category. If a facility’s falls data (and other relevant findings) warrants SFF designation, State Agency representatives will work with their leadership team to identify steps to improve compliance and quality of care.

SFFs that routinely fail to demonstrate sustained improvement or a good faith effort to improve quality of care are subject to progressively stronger enforcement actions, including increased frequency of standard health surveys, higher CMPs and a Discretionary Denial of Payment for New Admissions (DDPNA).

BOTTOM LINE: Facilities with higher fall rates may face greater surveyor scrutiny and risk being selected for participation in the SFF Program.

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STEPS TO FACILITY COMPLIANCE

- ✓ Inform facility staff of this change in surveyor focus.
- ✓ Ensure all falls are accurately reported and supported with documentation of prevention efforts, follow-up care, and corrective actions.
- ✓ Review facility falls prevalence data through MDS 3.0 Facility-Level QM Report (through iQIES).
- ✓ Leverage your PharMerica Consultant Pharmacist to identify residents at increased risk of medication-induced falls and educate facility staff as needed.

HOW PHARMERICA CAN HELP

PharMerica's consultant pharmacist team is available to:

- ✓ Participate in IDT meetings to collaborate on resident fall risk assessments and review fall prevention protocols.
- ✓ Provide staff education to identify modifiable fall risk factors and medications associated with increased risk of falls.
- ✓ Assess **high-risk medications** (e.g., anticholinergics, sedating medications, etc.) during routine medication regimen reviews (MRR) to report and provide recommendations on safer alternative therapies.
- ✓ Provide focused interim MRRs for residents that have experienced falls or have a high risk of a future fall.

To aid in conducting comprehensive fall risk assessments and identifying medications appropriate for deprescribing, PharMerica offers serviced facilities access to our holistic **Falls Risk Report**.

Incorporating the nine medication classes included in the **CDC's STEADI-Rx Program** for fall prevention, along with identifying medications contributing to **anticholinergic burden**, our report assists in stratifying residents by their relative risk for medication-induced falls.

For further information on how to leverage this tool within your facility, reach out to your dedicated consultant pharmacist!

IMPORTANT LINKS

- **QSO-23-01-NH:** [Revisions to the Special Focus Facility \(SFF\) Program](#)
- **OIG Report:** [Nursing Homes Failed To Report 43 Percent of Falls With Major Injury and Hospitalization Among Their Medicare-Enrolled Residents](#)
- **PharMerica Article:** [Spring Forward with Fall Prevention – Compliance and Documentation](#)
- **CDC:** [STEADI-Rx Program](#)