



# Checking All the Boxes of the CMS Guidelines for Healthcare

*How a new, digital approach to proving CMS compliance benefits hospitals and other healthcare organizations.*

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) plays a large role in the operations of many healthcare facilities across the United States. For some facilities, it's one of the biggest factors. And, for others, the CMS plays a much smaller role.

Regardless of the weight the CMS places on a healthcare facility— be it an ambulatory surgical center, long term care facility, hospital, etc. — complying with the agency's preparedness standards is a must.

Meeting the preparedness requirements of the CMS spells a lot of benefits for healthcare facilities, especially for those that treat a high volume of Medicare and Medicaid patients. Doing so means less in losses for the facility, and a stream of funds that can be allocated to any number of current or planned projects.

As emergency response and planning professionals in the healthcare industry know, achieving the standards of the CMS, and qualifying for the promised reimbursement, isn't simple. The size and diversity of a healthcare network will significantly influence what's asked of a facility (or network) by the CMS.

## The CMS Crosswalk

Each facility has its own criteria to meet. While there is overlap between different types of medical and healthcare facilities, each one is unique.

The CMS crosswalk lays out dozens of tags, and it has a good reason for doing so.

Emergency preparedness should be a cornerstone in the operations of any organization. When the lens focuses on healthcare, the need for emergency planning and preparedness only magnifies; while all organizations are vulnerable to emergencies and disasters, healthcare facilities are especially so because of the inherent nature of their operations.

The people receiving the care these facilities provide rely on them, and these facilities rely on an almost constant stream of supplies, specialized machines, and highly trained professionals to make services possible. Continuity of operations and having the knowledge of what to do in an emergency scenario is a must for healthcare facilities of all types.

At first glance, the CMS crosswalk can be a lot to take in, especially for larger healthcare networks. And, even after spending time understanding the requirements and standards, it still is a heavy dose of information.

Luckily, for some healthcare organizations, the requirements of the CMS crosswalk are, mostly, to-do items they've already checked off the list. Those with the resources to have thoroughly developed their emergency preparedness operations across their entire networks will have considerably less to do to meet the benchmarks set by the CMS.

Smaller and less equipped facilities may struggle, especially in comparison to large healthcare networks.



*As of October 2019,  
just under 74,000,000  
people enrolled in  
Medicaid and CHIP  
programs across the US.*

Source: <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/medicaid-facts-and-figures>

They may not have the resources needed to check every box the CMS requires, or they may not have the experience in emergency planning to know how to meet the requirements of the crosswalk.

### **Across the Board**

The driving force behind the CMS standards is to centralize preparedness efforts and measures across the healthcare industry. No one EOP will be the same, even for two similar centers within a network, but the guidelines the CMS providers help make sure all healthcare facilities across the U.S. are uniform and efficient in emergency response efforts.

The primary incentive for healthcare providers and facilities across the country is the promised reimbursement of the costs incurred by treating Medicare and Medicaid patients. This alone makes it worth pursuing. The ancillary benefits and additional savings of being prepared (as defined by the CMS) is also another spur to be in the good graces of the CMS.

The most challenging part of this journey, however, is the lack of structure in the path to preparedness. It's not inaccurate to describe the CMS crosswalk as more of a conglomeration of various response tactics and best practices than one cohesively themed track of actions.

Ultimately, the deciding factor in ensuring a facility receives the promised reimbursement by the CMS is whether or not the compliance of the facility can be demonstrated.

### **How to Show Compliance with the CMS Crosswalk**

If, for a healthcare facility and network, showing their compliance with the CMS guidelines is such an important part of earning Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, what's the best way to do so?

The decades-old methods using pen, paper, binders, and folders is tried-and-true, and especially so under a tight preparedness program and efficient management of the documents.

While the old school methods of preparedness and its demonstration may still work, there are many other ways response, planning, and continuity professionals at healthcare organizations can do this thanks to what's available on the market.

What a lot of these platforms and tools offer is a holistically more efficient program, one that personnel can easily interact with. For those in charge of these programs, having a platform that's flexible means a more streamlined experience for not only the person in charge of maintaining a facility's or network's

preparedness, but other personnel that play small roles throughout the process.

As we mentioned before, however, the presentation of being prepared matters most in regards to the CMS ruling. How can a digital platform make this part of the operation a smoother process for someone in charge of a facility's preparedness and continuity?

### Presenting CMS Preparedness Digitally

If you ask, "How can I ensure my facility or organization is CMS compliant?" question is "Present the data showing that your organization meets the CMS preparedness guidelines." But answering the question so simply ignores another key trouble of compliance operations.

While your organization and its teams can do everything correctly, auditors something that also facilitates their role in the process. Auditors often don't have the time to comb through everything a facility or organization does.

This where documentation comes in handy. In order to present that a facility or organization is compliant with the guidelines, it needs data to build a report. By tracking the preparedness and response tasks team members perform, the person in charge of preparedness (and ensuring their organization meets the CMS guidelines), can thoroughly and concisely show auditors the effectiveness of their emergency management programs.

But tracking compliance and preparedness tasks, much like asking for the participation of stakeholders in business continuity planning, is easier said than done. Manual processes just can't keep pace with the demands and requirements and put a lot of unnecessary onus on the practitioners.

Practitioners should actively look for means of making this side of CMS compliance less stressful. There are a lot of resources available for those people practicing in today's landscape that can alleviate the burdens of manual processes, especially for an operation such as compliance tracking.

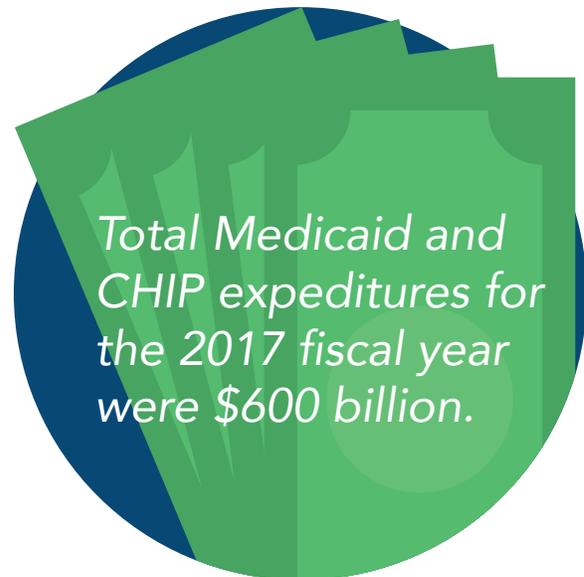
### The Benefits of Going Digital for CMS

To demonstrate your healthcare facility's compliance with the CMS guidelines, you need a lot of data. There's no way around this fact; you need something to back up the checkmarks in the boxes printed next to each guideline.

Gathering supporting data can be intensive with more manual methods. It may mean emailing long lists of individuals, combing through an inbox, or chasing down documents. But by moving this aspect of compliance to a digital platform, the bulk of the work can be shifted from the practitioners to their stakeholders.

But does shifting the responsibility just recreate the same issue, just with new individuals? It can, but that depends on gears behind the digital solution and if it streamlines the process.

Ideally, a digital solution greatly limits the time and energy stakeholders have to dedicate to compliance related activities. A digital solution, for example, could digitize an inspection form, allowing personnel to perform that inspection using technology already available to them, such as their mobile phones or a tablet.



Source: <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/medicaid-facts-and-figures>

A digital platform that gathers data can also lend a hand in presenting that data. Another benefit of using a digital solution for CMS compliance is the data ecosystem that comes alongside it. By gathering data using a digital platform and storing it there, a practitioner can cut the number of steps needed to make it presentable.

Dashboards are one of the best ways to present information now, which is especially true for larger sets of data. A CMS compliance program housed in a digital platform can feed all the data it gathers from stakeholders across the organization into a clean dashboard that a practitioner can not only manage the program from, but easily demonstrate the facility's compliance with the appropriate tags.

Additionally, digital platforms typically come packaged with more than reporting and data collection capabilities. By implementing a digital platform for CMS compliance operations, your organization would also be providing its staff a space for collaborating during CMS compliance operations, but even other emergency management and continuity operations as well.

## **Preparedness and CMS**

The CMS guidelines may just look like another one of the many standards hospitals and healthcare facilities have to maintain throughout the course of their operations. But, in reality, it's one of the most important operations a hospital engages in, as it secures reimbursement for patients using Medicare and Medicaid.

The trickiest part of being CMS compliant is proving a facility's compliance. Technology, as it has done for many things, has made this process much easier for its practitioners. By using a digital platform for CMS compliance tracking, a hospital can ensure it not only can demonstrate its compliance with the CMS guidelines, but also provide its staff with a tool for collaboration and planning.