

Flex Program Fundamentals

About the Flex Monitoring Team



INTRODUCTION

The Flex Monitoring Team (FMT) is a consortium of researchers from the Universities of Minnesota, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Southern Maine. With a five-year (2018–23) cooperative agreement award (PHS Grant No. U27RH01080) from the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP), the FMT monitors and evaluates the Flex Program by developing relevant quality, financial, and community-benefit performance measures and reporting systems. FMT research assesses the impact of the Flex Program on Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) and rural communities. The team also examines the ability of the State Offices of Rural Health to achieve overall Flex Program objectives: improving access to quality health care services, improving the financial and operational performance of CAHs, and engaging rural communities in healthcare system development.

HOW THE FLEX MONITORING TEAM CAN HELP YOU

The FMT’s researchers have years of experience examining topics that are directly relevant to CAHs and the Flex Program. Ongoing and annual research projects typically result in publications that state Flex Coordinators can use to gain a better understanding of CAH financial and operational performance, quality performance, and community impact to support your work (presentations and meetings, grant applications, publications, etc.) with CAH-relevant evidence. The [FMT website](#) provides access to all FMT publications, presentation slides, data reports, project descriptions, and more.

The Critical Access Hospital Measurement and Performance Assessment System (CAHMPAS) is an online data query system that allows state Flex Coordinators to explore the financial, quality, and community-benefit performance of CAHs. Data for CAHs in your state are identified by name; however, data for CAHs in other states are shown but not identified. The financial data portal requires an authorized login and password made available to state Flex Coordinators, State Office of Rural Health directors, and CAH CEOs and CFOs. New developments to the financial portal include data visualizations showing predicted risk of CAH financial distress and showing state-level CAH reporting and performance on select financial indicators as compared to national benchmarks. Quality and community data are now aggregated to the state level and are publicly available without a login on a new website, launched in early 2019. For quality performance, users can create customized tables and graphs with Hospital Compare data, make comparisons between states, and create tables and graphs for individual or pre-defined sets of measures. Community data also allow users to create customized reports with measures related to community socioeconomic characteristics, health outcomes, health risks and behaviors, and more. Visit the [CAHMPAS website](#) for more information and, for financial CAHMPAS login credentials, contact the FMT at monitoring@flexmonitoring.org.

The FMT uses an email listserv to disseminate reports and publications. As a state Flex Coordinator, you are automatically subscribed to this list as a requirement of your grant award. Other Flex Program/CAH staff in your state can easily subscribe by contacting the FMT or submitting information via the FMT's homepage.

ONGOING PROJECTS

Analyzing Financial, Quality, and Community Impact Performance of CAHs

Purpose: to improve financial, quality, and community impact performance of CAHs through data analysis and dissemination in the three domains. The project will produce numerous data products on financial, quality, and community impact, using a variety of data sources, including the American Hospital Association Annual Survey, the Hospital Compare database, and the Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Project (MBQIP).

CAHMPAS Query System Maintenance, Enhancement, and Development

Purpose: to prepare and upload updated data for CAHMPAS, develop new and maintain existing features on the website, and provide technical assistance to registered users. In the coming year, this project will refine the financial dashboard and enhance user functions for the financial, quality, and community data to provide information in the most useable format for CAHs and state Flex Coordinators.

Maintaining and Updating the National CAH Database

Purpose: to continue tracking CAH conversions and closures. A CAH dataset housed at the University of North Carolina will be updated with information on conversions supplied by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). These data are also used to update products on the FMT website, including a spreadsheet that lists all certified CAHs and a map of current CAHs. The site also includes a table that contains state-level totals of the number of CAHs, the number of CAHs with rehabilitation distinct part units (DPU), and the number of CAHs with psychiatric DPUs.

NEW PROJECTS, 2021–2022

Supporting CAHs and CAH Staff During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This project will: A) assess the impact of system affiliation among CAHs and identify best practices for supporting independent CAHs during the COVID-19 crisis, and B) identify and highlight best practices for CAHs supporting their staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Evaluation of the Flex Program

This project will: A) collect and analyze data to evaluate FORHP’s Quality Innovation Labs projects, and B) produce recommendations for the future of the Flex Program during the current funding cycle and the next funding cycle.

Evaluating the EMS Supplemental Funding Program and Identifying EMS Licensure Elements

This project concludes a multi-year evaluation of the eight Flex EMS Supplemental funding grantees, and also will identify a rural-relevant minimum data set of core EMS agency licensure elements for consideration by state EMS agencies.

Financial and Community Characteristics of CAHs Participating in Value-Based Care

This project will describe the participation of CAHs in value-based care (VBC) initiatives, and compare the financial and community characteristics of CAHs participating in VBC initiatives and CAHs not participation in VBC initiatives.

Examining CAH Engagement in Multi-Sector Community Networks

This project will examine the involvement of CAHs in multi-sector community health networks and identify strategies to assist CAHs in developing collaborative relationships with local health departments, other health care providers, and social service agencies to develop and improve local systems of care.

Use of Translation Services in CAHs

This project will identify and disseminate best practices for providing translation services in CAHs, particularly those in communities with larger populations who have limited English proficiency.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

The Flex Monitoring Team publishes research findings in the form of briefing papers (detailed, comprehensive reports), policy briefs (shorter overviews paired with key findings), data summary reports (comprehensive collections of data), topic-specific toolkits, and state-specific reports.

All publications are searchable on the website by topic, date, or keyword and are freely available for download. The Flex Monitoring Team’s most recent publications include:

- [Outcome Measures for State Flex Program Financial and Operational Improvement Interventions \(policy brief\)](#)
- [Critical Access Hospitals’ Initial Response to COVID-19 by System Affiliation \(data report\)](#)
- [MBQIP Quality Measures National Annual Report – 2020 \(data report\)](#)
- [Critical Access Hospitals’ Initial Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Use of Federal Funding and Regulatory Flexibilities \(policy brief\)](#)

- [How Critical Access Hospitals Are Addressing the Social Needs of Rural Populations \(policy brief\)](#)
- [The Association Between System Affiliation and Financial Performance in Critical Access Hospitals \(policy brief\)](#)
- [Community Impact and Benefit Activities of CAHs, Other Rural, and Urban Hospitals, 2019 \(data report\)](#)
- [CAH Financial Indicators Report: Summary of 2019 Indicator Medians by State \(data report\)](#)
- [Promising Flex Program Initiatives to Support Critical Access Hospitals during the COVID-19 Pandemic \(policy brief\)](#)
- [Evaluation of the Use of CAH Cohorts for Quality Improvement Activities \(policy brief\)](#)
- [Innovations and Workforce Challenges for CAHs during COVID-19 \(policy brief\)](#)
- [CAH Partnerships during the COVID-19 Pandemic \(policy brief\)](#)
- [Monitoring State Flex Program Financial and Operational Improvement Activities \(policy brief\)](#)
- [Rural Initiatives Addressing Community Social Needs \(case series\)](#)
- [MBQIP Quality Measures Annual Report – 2019 \(data report\)](#)

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