

Flex Program

Fundamentals 2021

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 (SORH) 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, SORH 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, 2020–2021

Evaluation of New Quality Measures for the Flex Program

This project will evaluate three quality measures that are not currently part of the MBQIP program or the FMT's annual data reports to assess the feasibility of using additional measures for evaluating quality improvement in the Flex Program, and within MBQIP. The project will include soliciting feedback from State Flex Programs and CAH quality improvement staff.

Evaluation of State Flex Program Activities

These two separate evaluation projects will: A) continue a multi-year evaluation of the eight Flex Emergency Medical Services Supplement projects, focusing on monitoring project activities, identifying any challenges and barriers to project operation, and assessing progress on the short-

term outputs and outcomes measures identified for each project; and B) monitor the initiatives that state Flex programs are implementing in the Population Health Program Area, including reviewing how states are tracking the impact of these activities.

Examining the Effect of System Affiliation on Critical Access Hospital Financial Performance

This project will identify CAHs that are affiliated with a health system, identify the nature of the affiliation, and describe differences in financial performance of CAHs that are and are not affiliated with a health system. A secondary objective is to explore the feasibility of adding system-affiliation to the peer group factors in CAHMPAS.

Strategic Responses to COVID-19 in Critical Access Hospitals

The objective of this project is to assess the capacity of CAHs to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and identify best practices for strategies they deployed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in their rural community.

Lessons Learned from Efforts to Support Vulnerable Critical Access and Other Rural Hospitals

This project will review state and federal demonstrations and initiatives to support vulnerable CAHs and rural hospitals, summarize lessons learned from those efforts, explore the application of those lessons to current policy efforts to address hospital closures, and identify resources and tools to assist FORHP and state Flex Programs in their efforts to support at-risk hospitals.

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:

- [Supporting CAHs during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Summary Results of a Survey of State Flex Coordinators](#)
- [Addressing Opioid Use in Rural Communities: Examples from Critical Access Hospitals](#)
- [Provision of Mental Health Services by Critical Access Hospital-Based Rural Health Clinics](#)
- [Best Practices from 14 CAH Executives Operating in Challenging Environments](#)
- [Hospital Compare Quality Measure Results for U.S. CAHs, 2018](#)

CONTACT THE FLEX MONITORING TEAM

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