

# ELDER LAW UPDATE

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## Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services Launch Ranking System

By Allison Evans

Finding the best nursing home care available in your area can be difficult at best. To ease the challenge, the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS) recently launched an innovative five-star ranking system of America's nursing homes on its Nursing Home Compare Website. The primary purpose of this tool is to provide those who place patients into nursing homes with detailed information about the performance of every Medicaid and Medicare certified nursing home in the country.

While the CMS Web site provides extensive data on nursing homes, the ranking system will help beneficiaries, their families and caregivers compare nursing homes more easily. Nursing homes will be ranked using a five-tier system, with five stars representing "above average" and one star representing "below average" in terms of the quality of care offered. The goal is to provide the public with easy access to information that can help them make informed decisions about nursing homes. The ranking system will also be used as an incentive for nursing homes to strive towards earning the highest rating by providing an environment of better quality care. Through its consumer information Web sites, CMS is beginning to offer more

and better information on the quality, patient satisfaction, and cost of care. The new ratings will be created using the information already posted on the site, such as the results of nursing home inspections, and will incorporate additional information as well, such as scores on quality measures, staffing information and a three-year history of the home's health, safety and fire inspection reports.

Consumers and professionals can source and screen for nursing homes on [snapforseniors.com](http://snapforseniors.com) and can now directly link from selected listings to the facility's report card on Nursing Home Compare.

The star ranking system is the most recent move by CMS designed to protect the more than 3 million people who rely on nursing home services each year nationwide. CMS plans to update the information on the Web site quarterly.

The ratings will be posted on the agency's Nursing Home Compare Web site by the end of this year. A sample screen shot of the proposed star ratings is available at [www.cms.hhs.gov/PressContacts/10\\_P\\_R\\_fivestar.asp](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/PressContacts/10_P_R_fivestar.asp).

During June and July 2008, the agency is soliciting ideas, comments and suggestions from the public,

consumer groups, nursing homes and many others. Comments may be sent to [BetterCare@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:BetterCare@cms.hhs.gov).

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