



The secret to seeing more Stars

Why Medicare Advantage plans should pay attention to eye exams

For several years now, the Medicare Star Rating System has been used to measure how well Medicare Advantage and Part D plans function. As an indicator of plan performance, it's a useful tool for consumers to compare plans.

Recently, some subtle changes in the rating system, reflecting a re-emphasis on the member experience, may have far-reaching effects on the Medicare Advantage market.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has implemented changes to how it weighs quality measurements and how it awards submeasure ratings, making it harder for plans to simply be "average." Because these changes impact overall Star rating – and because Star rating is closely correlated to membership numbers – plans can't afford to overlook the member experience in general, and vision benefits in particular. Every measure counts.

As a result of these changes, Medicare Advantage plans need to become more effective at helping targeted members get necessary eye exams and working with their network providers to offer a positive experience. This ability could help determine the plan's Star rating and, in turn, their membership.



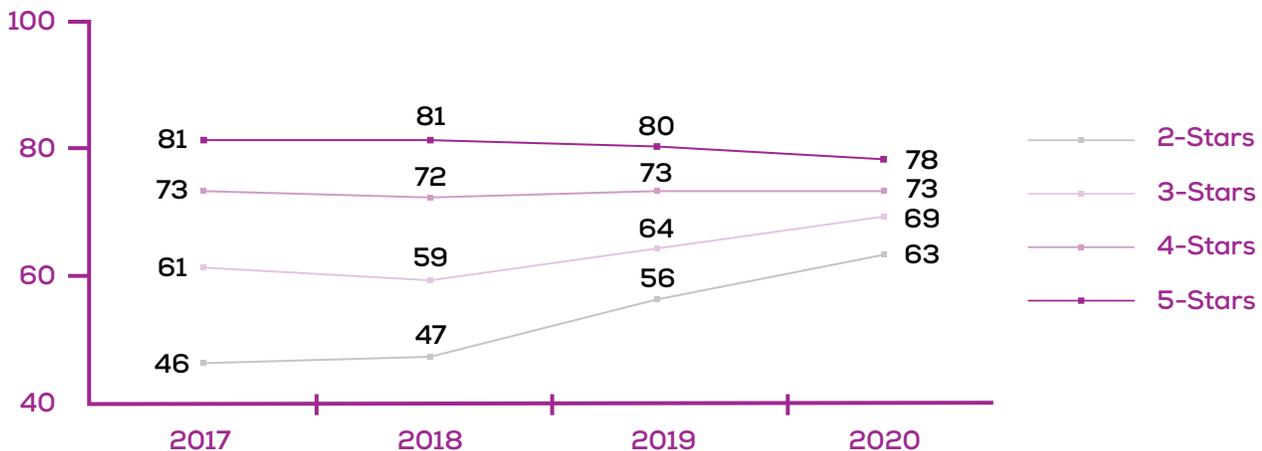
A small change with big impact

The Diabetes Care Eye Exam Rating measures the percentage of members with diabetes who received an eye exam in the past year. Plans receive between 1–5 EyeStars based on their success rate. For example, a 78% success rate or higher would earn a plan 5 EyeStars that would affect their overall Star Rating.

Over the last few years, Medicare Advantage has quickly raised the bar for low performers (those earning 1 or 2 Stars) by implementing higher minimum scores. What was once a 3 in many cases may now only earn 1 or 2 Stars (*Chart A*).

Chart A: Minimum Scores for Lower Tiers are Much Higher

Members with diabetes who received an eye exam



THE SECRET TO SEEING MORE STARS

This change has had two immediate effects. First, the difference between 5-Star performance and 1-Star performance is dramatically shrinking, or compressing. Second, this compression also means that the “average” middle ground is being squeezed out. Since 2018, the number of 3-Star plans has steadily declined (*Chart B*). Meanwhile, the number of 4+ Star plans and the number of 1–2 Star plans have grown. (In fact, the number of 1–2 Star plans has nearly tripled) (*Chart C*).

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Chart B: Less Mediocrity, More Separation

Diabetic eye exam EyeStars

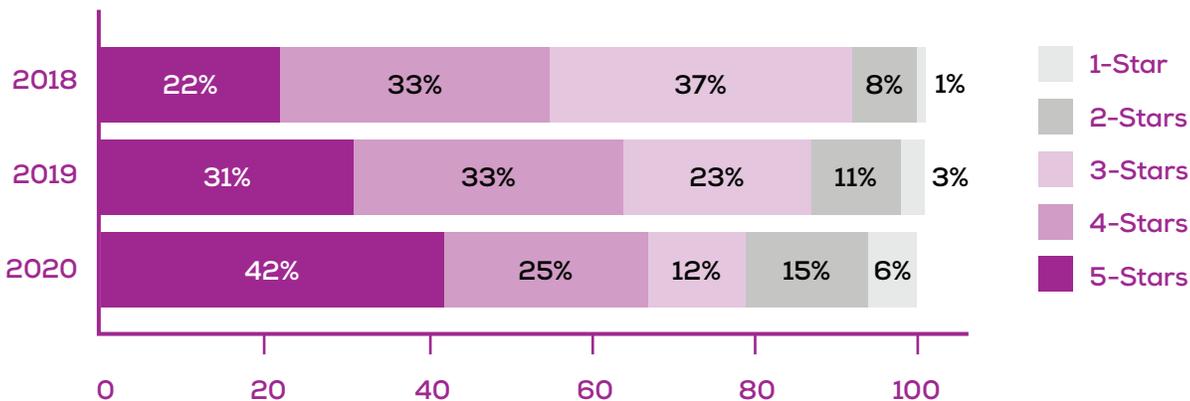
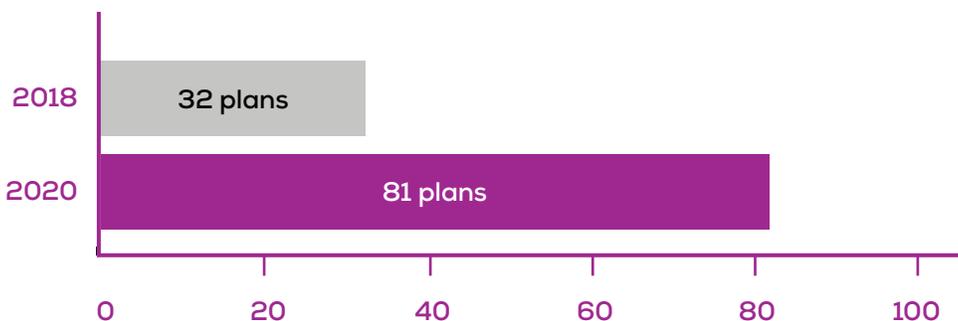


Chart C: Number of Low Scores Nearly Triples

Plans with 1 or 2 EyeStars based on diabetic submeasure



Member experience means more than ever

Medicare Advantage is incentivizing plans to help make the patient experience more enjoyable and meaningful.

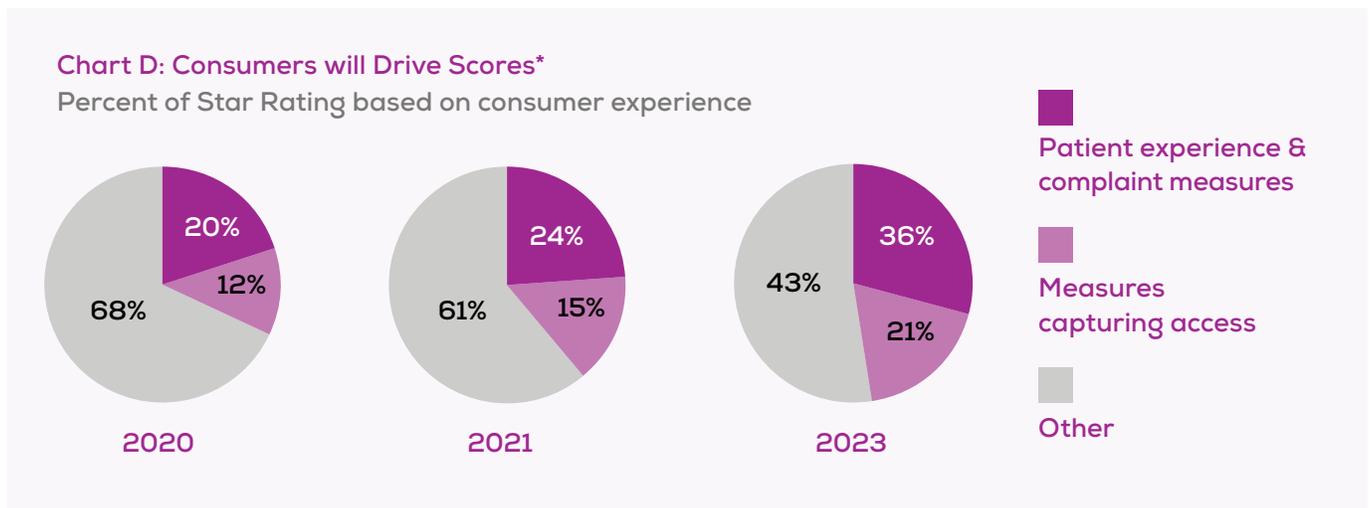
Of 40 quality measurements that determine Star ratings, 16 are already related to the patient experience and access.* While these issues have always been a ratings priority, the importance of consumer experience measures are about to be elevated significantly. In 2020, 32% of Star ratings were based on weighted scores of consumer experience and opinions. By 2023, that weight will rise to 57% (Chart D).*

Starting with the 2023 ratings, answers to survey questions like these and others will grow in importance:

- Do you understand your medications?
- How quickly could you schedule an appointment?
- How good was communication with the provider?
- Was the doctor's office clean?
- Were you able to find transportation to the appointment?

Performance on these questions does not entirely depend on the provider – plans play a role as well. Medicare Advantage plans that provide digital self-service tools, such as an online provider locator and appointment scheduler, will have a distinct advantage. Patient education sites and transparency tools could be even more critical.

With the sizable shift in weight, plans will not be able to rely on other measures to make up for a poor consumer experience if they hope to maintain a high Star Rating. The status quo could mean falling behind or even losing Stars.



*Carlton S., Neher K., Repasky C.; "New Stars ratings for Medicare Advantage prioritize customer experiences"; (Oct 2020); McKinsey & Company

Higher ratings mean more members

Intuitively, it makes sense that higher Star ratings correlate to higher plan membership. Consumers use Star ratings to filter and compare Medicare Advantage plans; a higher rating is an advantage that makes a plan more attractive. Plan with a 5 Star rating have an even larger built-in advantage, as they're able to market year-round.

The numbers back up the idea that high performers are rewarded with higher membership. More than 80% of Medicare Advantage members are in plans with 4+ Stars (Chart E). Also, 55% of the entire Medicare Advantage market is held by national plans with 4+ Stars.

The advantage only looks to grow along with the emphasis on patient experience. In 2019, plans with an average customer experience rating of 4+ Stars added 2.1 times more net members than other plans.* And in a study of health insurers, satisfied members were 5 times more likely to renew their coverage.*

This correlation holds for the EyeStar rating submeasure too. Nearly 90% of Medicare Advantage members are in plans with 4+ EyeStars. Plans that are "average" in this measure are actually falling behind.

As the market increasingly stratifies into haves and have nots, plans must pay attention to customer experience and submeasures like the Diabetic Eye Exam to hold onto membership.

Chart E: Strong Correlation Between Ratings and Membership

Percent of 2020 Medicare Advantage membership (Overall Star Ratings)

	5 Stars	4.5 Stars	4 Stars	3.5 Stars	3 Stars	2.5 Stars
National Plan	8.4%	19.9%	27%	9.7%	0.9%	0.1%
Blues Plan	0.7%	3.1%	7.7%	3.3%	1.0%	0%
Local Plan	0.6%	4.2%	6.7%	2.2%	0.5%	0%
Regional Plan	0.1%	2.0%	0.8%	0.2%	0.8%	0%
Subtotal	9.9%	29.2%	42.2%	15.4%	3.2%	0.1%



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Plans have the power to raise their score

Net Promoter Scores (NPS), a widely used measure of customer satisfaction, signify both a problem and opportunity for Medicare Advantage plans looking to maintain higher Star Ratings. In 2018, health plans had an NPS of 19 – lower than every sector except utilities.*

While NPS doesn't affect Star Ratings, Medicare Advantage plans will soon be evaluated and rewarded to a large extent on patient satisfaction, which doesn't seem to be a current strength. However, plans that work to improve in this area have the opportunity to outperform their peers.

Medicare Advantage plans can't be in a position to earn 4 or 5 Stars by ignoring member satisfaction or submeasures like Diabetes Eye Exams – every measure counts. Taking action to support vision care can help plans stay out of the ratings basement.

HOW PLANS CAN BE A HIGH PERFORMER

1. Make eye exams more accessible

Medicare Advantage plans should include and promote vision benefits that value member care. This means offering a low (or zero dollar) copay for comprehensive eye exams, a diverse provider network with plenty of options that fit each member, and a generous benefit for frames, lenses and contacts.

2. Focus on motivating members

Eye exam reminders, interventions for members with health or eye conditions, and even incentives can help persuade members to get the eye care they need.

3. Offer vision-specific tools that make life easier

- Simple member site for managing benefits and claims
- Online provider locator that filters preferences
- Transparent cost calculator to help members plan
- Mobile app for convenient access to ID card and benefit details

EyeMed members have access to all of these tools and more

Become a Medicare Advantage superstar

Let's talk about your Medicare Advantage plan and how you can improve your diabetic eye exam Star rating and enhance your member experience. **Contact your EyeMed rep or visit [eyemed.com](https://www.eyemed.com).**

CMS Data <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Prescription-Drug-Coverage/PrescriptionDrugCovGenIn/PerformanceData>
CMS enrollment data <https://www.cms.gov/research-statistics-data-and-systems/statistics-trends-and-reports/mcradvpartdenroldata>

*Carlton S., Neher K., Repasky C.; "New Stars ratings for Medicare Advantage prioritize customer experiences"; (Oct 2020); McKinsey & Company



Vision benefits in the Medicare Advantage category continue to grow 2 – 4% each year

