

“Exploration of the Value and Role of Home Health Care in Medicare Advantage”

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Background

Skilled home health care (HH) is a critical setting of care for patients, especially as the United States' population continues to age. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the important role of HH in treating patients with skilled nursing and therapy needs. With Medicare Advantage (MA) accounting for an increasingly large percentage of Medicare beneficiaries, it is critical to understand how HH works within MA and the challenges and opportunities available for providing HH for MA beneficiaries.

Key Takeaways

HH has proven value in traditional Medicare both in the care provided and the ability to reduce healthcare spending. However, there remains a need for a better understanding of the value of HH in MA. HH will continue to play an important role for an aging population, and as such, it is critical to continue to investigate the relationship between HH and MA. Though innovative programs within MA do exist for providing care in the home, such as hospital-at-home and United Healthcare's HouseCalls, these may function differently from skilled HH and are not replacements for skilled HH.

Through their literature review, the authors found that utilization of, and access to, HH care is often limited in MA, consistent with findings regarding MA health care utilization in other areas. However, there is limited research on HH patient outcomes in traditional Medicare versus MA which is critical to understanding what impact this may be having on patients.

Building off the literature review, researchers interviewed key stakeholders about the role of HH in MA. While interviewees stressed the importance of HH in caring for an aging population, significant barriers exist for HH working within MA. Interviewees expressed concerns that MA plans broadly lacked an understanding of HH's role and value in the care continuum, and that the authorization process used by MA plans may be limiting the access to skilled HH for patients enrolled in MA.

Overall, the study found that while opportunities exist for HH in MA plans, barriers, including a lack of understanding about HH, limited data, accessibility, and minimal research on outcomes and impact, may be limiting the role skilled HH plays in MA.

Next Steps

Further research is needed on how MA can better utilize skilled HH. This research should focus on looking at patient outcomes in MA and traditional Medicare, which will help determine where barriers to access for HH patients exist within the MA program. Further research into the types of patients receiving HH in traditional Medicare and MA, and the HH services they receive, will also inform how HH may be better utilized in MA moving forward.

Additional research exploring patient outcomes for HH in MA is also needed to establish HH's role in care delivery as MA programs continue to expand and make changes to the scope of care delivery allowable under the benefit. This research will be critical in identifying patient populations most suited for HH and ensuring their access to HH in MA plans.

Access to data on MA beneficiaries' healthcare use and outcomes is also critical to furthering research into patient outcomes and will help facilitate research vital to caring for aging patients in the home.

About the Study

In 2019, the Alliance contracted with KNG Health Consulting to address the current understanding of and future needs related to HH's role in the MA program. The study is intended to examine ways HH is currently integrated into MA plans, what limitations exist, and the possible opportunities for the future. Understanding the current role and limitations is accomplished through both a literature review and interviews with key stakeholders. Through a review of the new supplemental benefits for MA, the study looks at what is currently missing and the potential impact for the future of HH.

Read more:

[ahhqi.org/research/medicare-advantage-report](https://www.ahhqi.org/research/medicare-advantage-report)

About the Alliance: The Alliance for Home Health Quality and Innovation is a non-profit, national consortium of home health care providers and organizations. The Alliance invests in research and education about home health care and its ability to deliver quality, cost-effective, patient-centered care across the care continuum. The Alliance is committed to conducting and sponsoring research and initiatives that demonstrate and enhance the value proposition that home health care has to offer patients and the entire U.S. health care system.

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