

Accreditation Process Overview

The Joint Commission's accreditation process seeks to help organizations identify and resolve problems and to inspire them to improve the safety and quality of care and services provided. The process focuses on systems critical to the safety and the quality of care, treatment and services.

Standards

Joint Commission standards are the basis of an objective evaluation process that can help health care organizations measure, assess and improve performance. The standards focus on important patient, individual or resident care, and organization functions that are essential to providing safe, high quality care. The Joint Commission's state-of-the-art standards set expectations for organization performance that are reasonable, achievable and surveyable. Joint Commission standards are developed with input from health care professionals, providers, subject matter experts, consumers, government agencies and employers. They are informed by the scientific literature and approved by the Board of Commissioners. New standards are added only if they relate to patient safety or quality of care, have a positive impact on health outcomes, and can be accurately and readily measured.

Survey process

A survey is designed to be individualized to each organization, to be consistent, and to support the organization's efforts to improve performance. During an accreditation survey, The Joint Commission evaluates an organization's performance of functions and processes aimed at continuously improving patient outcomes. This assessment is accomplished through evaluating an organization's compliance with the applicable standards in the manual, based on the following:

- Tracing the care delivered to patients
- Verbal and written information provided to The Joint Commission
- On-site observations and interviews by Joint Commission surveyors
- Documents provided by the organization

Joint Commission surveys are unannounced, with a few exceptions, such as with the Bureau of Prisons or Department of Defense facilities. An organization can have an unannounced survey between 18 and 39 months after its previous full survey. For example, if an organization's last survey was January 1, 2009, it could have its survey as early as July 1, 2010 or as late as April 1, 2012 (18 to 39 months). For more information, see "Facts about the on-site survey process."

Accreditation decisions

The accreditation decision process focuses on how critical an issue is to patient care or safety. Compliance with the standards is scored by determining compliance with elements of performance, which are specific performance expectations that must be in place for an organization to provide safe, high quality care, treatment and services. At the organization exit conference, the survey team presents a preliminary Summary of Survey Findings Report. In this report, organizations will not receive an accreditation decision or any scores. The final accreditation decision will be made after The Joint Commission receives and approves an organization's Evidence of Standards Compliance submission. As of January 1, 2011, the accreditation decision categories are Preliminary Accreditation, Accreditation, Accreditation with Follow-up Survey, Contingent Accreditation, Preliminary Denial of Accreditation, and Denial of Accreditation. For more information, see "Facts about accreditation decisions."

Expectations of accreditation

An organization's accreditation cycle is continuous, as long as the organization has a full, unannounced survey within 39 months of its last survey, and continues to meet all accreditation-related requirements, including, but not limited to, submission of an annual periodic performance review, and an annual subscription payment. The PPR is an additional requirement of the accreditation process in which an organization reviews its compliance with all applicable Joint Commission standards and completes and submits to The Joint Commission a plan of action for any standard not in full compliance. The plan of action also includes Measures of Success. The PPR facilitates a continuous accreditation process by incorporating an additional form of evaluation.

For more information, visit The Joint Commission website, www.jointcommission.org. Accredited organizations may also visit their Joint Commission Connect extranet site, or contact their account representative.