

Understanding Medicare's Star Ratings for Dialysis Facilities



While the Medicare agency wanted to use an easily understandable system familiar to consumers, officials did not want to be bound by customs or the public's expectations of what the stars mean. CMS developed its **own set of rules for dialysis star ratings**, where facilities are "graded on a curve." This means that all facilities are placed in a rank order, with the 30% of facilities at the bottom of the list limited to one or two stars. Patients should be aware of these **key differences** between common star ratings systems and Medicare's system.

Common Star Rating Systems

One or two stars for a **movie** means "thumbs down"– seeing the movie is not a good use of your time and money.

In **online product reviews** by buyers, most products receive four or five stars.

On the website **Yelp**, only 20% of restaurants get one or two stars.

In **hotel** classification systems, one or two stars apply to budget lodgings such as motels, with no-frills accommodations, minimal on-site facilities, and no emphasis on comfort and service.

Goods and services rated one or two stars receive those ratings because their product **did not satisfy** the customer.

Medicare's Dialysis Facility Compare

According to CMS, "a **one-star rating does not mean that you will receive poor care from a facility. It means that the results of one dialysis facility were below average compared to other dialysis facilities.**"

In Dialysis Facility Compare, **only 30% of facilities are allowed to receive four or five stars.**

In Dialysis Facility Compare, **30% of facilities automatically get one or two stars.**

Dialysis Facility Compare star ratings **do not evaluate the physical condition** or amenities of a clinic.

Facility ratings **do not consider patients' satisfaction** and can be low in part because of **matters outside facility's control**, such as patients not following their doctor's recommendations.

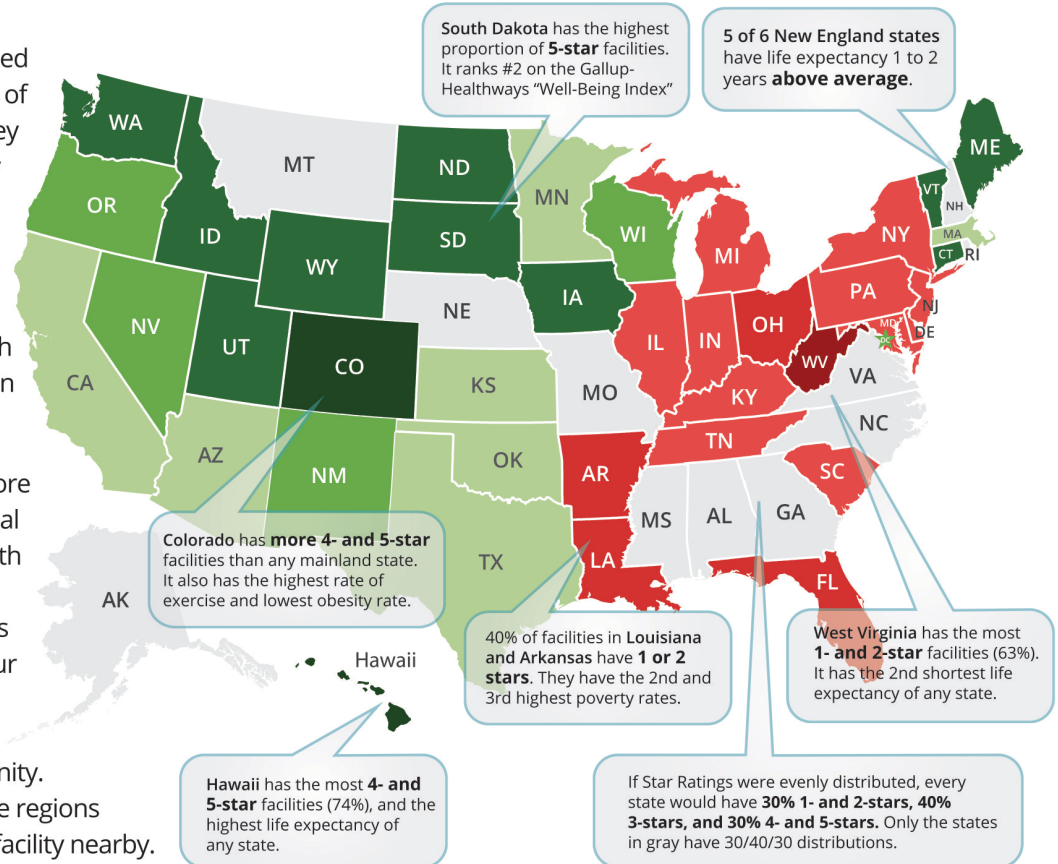
A one- or two-star rating should not alarm you. It does not mean your facility won't provide life-sustaining care. You should continue to attend your dialysis treatments and follow clinicians' advice on how to manage your kidney disease.

How Much Do Star Ratings Reflect Dialysis Facility Quality **VS.** Patients' Health Habits and Resources?



Dialysis Facilities' Star Ratings are based on two types of measures: Measures of activities taking place within the kidney care system, and measures of kidney patient outcomes. Some outcomes, such as transfusions, are heavily influenced by the care you receive, while others, such as mortality and hospitalizations, closely parallel health outcomes of the general population in a particular region.

The map below shows states with more 4- and 5-star facilities than the national average in shades of green. States with more 1- and 2-star facilities than the national average are shown in shades of red. If your state is shaded red, your facility may be receiving a low rating because it serves a less healthy or economically disadvantaged community. It may be difficult for patients in some regions of the country to find a high ranking facility nearby.



Given these significant limitations to the star ratings program, we encourage you to consider these questions (and ask a dialysis facility staff member if you don't know):

- ➔ **Does** the Performance Score Certificate posted in your facility indicate that it "meets standard" on measures of quality?
- ➔ **When** was the last CMS inspection of your facility completed, and what were the findings?
- ➔ **Is** your facility the only 1- or 2-star facility in the region, or do other nearby facilities have similar ratings?
- ➔ **Do** most of the other patients adhere to your care team's advice about diet, fluid, etc. and complete all of their sessions? if many patients in your facility are not following the advice of their care team this could contribute to your facility performing lower on the star ratings. (If you have trouble following the advice of your care team you should talk to them about the reasons.)
- ➔ **Are** your monthly lab numbers in the proper range?
- ➔ **Does** the dialysis facility staff listen to you and address your needs?
- ➔ **How** well do you feel during and after dialysis?
- ➔ **Have** you received clear and understandable advice from the staff in the dialysis facility like the dietitian, nurse and social worker about what your role is in improving your own health?
- ➔ **Are** you satisfied with the overall cleanliness of the facility?
- ➔ **Do** you have any concerns about the care you are receiving?

The best advice is to take charge of your health care. Learn as much as you can and don't be afraid to ask questions, especially when it comes to your diet, medications and treatment plans.