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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of This Manual

This manual describes the functions of the Home Health Care CAHPS®1 (HHCAHPS) Survey website and provides instructions and guidelines on the mechanics of submitting survey data to the HHCAHPS Data Center. Procedures for sampling and constructing HHCAHPS data files—including the variables that must be submitted for each sample month and the format of the monthly data files—are provided in the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual. Users of the HHCAHPS website and approved survey vendors are strongly urged to review and be knowledgeable about the protocols and procedures described in the Protocols and Guidelines Manual before reviewing this manual.

Section 1 of this manual presents an overview of the manual’s layout and content. Section 2 describes the public and private functions and links on the project website. System and security requirements are described in Section 3. Section 4 contains information about the template that survey vendors will prepare and use to submit HHCAHPS Survey data to the Data Center. Step-by-step instructions for submitting data files are provided in Section 5, along with a description of each of the reports available to users relating to data submission. Section 6 contains information specific to home health agencies (HHAs) on registering for user credentials, authorizing a vendor, viewing data submission reports, and managing their user account. It also contains a list of frequently asked questions and answers to be used as a resource by HHAs.

1.2 Overview of the HHCAHPS Survey

The HHCAHPS Survey is designed to measure the experiences of people receiving home health care from Medicare-certified HHAs. The survey is conducted by multiple survey vendors working under contract with HHAs and involves ongoing data collection with monthly and quarterly data submissions. Survey vendors prepare and submit data files to the HHCAHPS Survey Data Center, which is operated and maintained by staff at RTI International, the organization assisting the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) with coordinating the national implementation of the HHCAHPS Survey. RTI project staff members are hereafter referred to as the Coordination Team.

Beginning in April 2012, HHCAHPS survey results were publicly reported on the Medicare.gov (Home Health Compare) website, http://www.medicare.gov/. The publicly reported results are updated each calendar quarter and reflect the most recently available four quarters of HHCAHPS Survey data.

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1 CAHPS® is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, a U.S. Government agency.
Survey vendors that wish to conduct the HHCAHPS Survey on behalf of an HHA must apply to become an approved HHCAHPS Survey vendor and meet specific business requirements. Survey vendors must also participate in an HHCAHPS Survey Introductory training session and all Update training sessions provided by CMS and be certified after the introductory training session. Approved survey vendors must follow all required protocols when they conduct the HHCAHPS Survey as described in the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual, which is located on the project website at https://homehealthcahps.org.

1.3 Overview of the HHCAHPS Survey Website

The HHCAHPS Survey website is a secure interactive website with public and private sections; it is the official website for the HHCAHPS Survey. In addition to housing the data submission tool, the website also serves as the main means of communicating information about the HHCAHPS Survey to survey vendors and to HHAs. It contains the Protocols and Guidelines Manual, the survey questionnaire (mail and telephone survey versions), and the HHCAHPS Survey supplemental questions. It also contains online forms, including the Exemption Request Form, the Discrepancy Notification Report Form, and the Vendor Participation Form (application), and is the means by which HHAs authorize survey vendors to conduct the HHCAHPS Survey on their behalf.

To ensure the security of interactions, the website has two levels of access: public and private. The public side of the website is located at https://homehealthcahps.org/. Approved HHCAHPS Survey vendors and HHAs use both the public and private sections of the website. On the public side, there is a login link that allows only authorized users to gain access to the private sections of the site. Once logged into the private side, survey vendor and HHA users can carry out administrative functions according to their assigned roles. Section 2 of this manual describes the functions and links on both the public and private sections of the website in detail.

The Coordination Team provides survey vendors with technical assistance and support for data submissions to the Data Center. Survey vendors can contact the Coordination Team by sending an e-mail or by calling the project’s toll-free telephone number shown below.

Project e-mail address: hhcahps@rti.org
Toll-free telephone number: 1-866-354-0985

The HHCAHPS Survey Coordination Team operates from 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Eastern Time Monday through Friday. Technical assistance is provided until 8:00 P.M. Eastern time during peak data upload periods.
2. The HHCAHPS Survey Website

2.1 Overview

This section provides an overview of the functions of the HHCAHPS Survey website and information on how to access and navigate the public and private sections of the website. Additional links or changes to the HHCAHPS project website will be made as needed throughout the national implementation of the Survey. Therefore, the links described in the following sections reflect those available at the time this manual was prepared and are subject to change. Changes to the project website will be posted on the Home page under “Recent Announcements.”

2.2 The Public Links on the HHCAHPS Survey Website

The website defaults to the Home page, shown in Figure 2.1, where users can navigate to menu options that provide information and guidance in completing specific tasks. The Home Page contains a welcome message that includes brief information about the HHCAHPS Survey. In that message, there are hyperlinks to other pages that provide more specific information on the history of the survey and how to become an approved vendor. In addition, a menu bar is displayed near the top of the Home page. Each menu has its own dropdown options to allow users to perform various functions and access more information. Public menu items include the following:

- General Information
- Training
- Forms for Vendors
- Survey and Protocols
- Data Submission
- For HHAs

Also provided on the Home page is a “Quick Links” box (Figure 2.2).
**Figure 2.1** HHCAHPS Survey Home Page (Public Website)

**Figure 2.2** Quick Links Box
The Quick Links box allows direct access to more commonly used links and includes the following topics:

- Star Ratings Information—links to a page containing information about the HHCAHPS Patient Survey Star Ratings methodology and FAQs.
- Approved Survey Vendors—a list of survey vendors that have been approved to administer the HHCAHPS Survey.
- HHA Participation Exemption Request Form—contains a link to the Participation Exemption Request form, which is used to request an exemption from participating in the HHCAHPS Survey for vendors whose patient base falls below a minimum threshold.
- About Home Health Care CAHPS—provides a quick reference to basic background information on the survey.
- Contact Us/Other Links—provides contact information for the Coordination Team and Technical Support and other links of interest.

Each of the menus on the Home page is described in the following sections.

### 2.2.1 General Information Menu

**Figure 2.3** displays the General Information menu.

**Figure 2.3  General Information Menu**

The General Information menu includes the following dropdown links:

- About Home Health Care CAHPS Survey—provides background information on the project.
- CTQR Newsletters—links to a page where the Coordination Team Quarterly Review (CTQR) Newsletters are posted.
- Mode Experiment—provides information about the HHCAHPS Survey mode experiment, which CMS and the Data Coordination Team conducted with a sample of home health patients in fall 2009.
• Vendor Application Process—describes the process to become an Approved Vendor.
• Approved Survey Vendors—provides the list of survey vendors that have been approved to administer the HHCAHPS Survey.
• Archived Publicly Reported Data—provides links to publicly reported state and national averages, publicly reported HHA-level data (for data previously reported on Home Health Compare on http://www.medicare.gov/), star ratings cut points, and linearized patient mix adjusters. Figure 2.4 presents a screen shot of this page.
• Calculating PR Measures—links to a document that provides steps for calculating the global ratings and composite scores for the publicly reported HHCAHPS Survey measures.
• Announcements—provides updated news about the survey, the website, or other information.
• Contact Us/Other Links—provides links for contacting the Coordination Team with questions, problems, and comments.

Figure 2.4  Archived Publicly Reported Data Menu
2.2.2 Training Menu

The links under the Training menu, shown in Figure 2.5, are provided below. The Registration Form is an online form that organizations interested in attending an HHCAHPS webinar training session must complete; it provides details about when the Webinar training sessions will take place. The link to the Registration Form will be removed as soon as registration for a Webinar training session closes. The Training Materials link provides the agenda and slides that can be downloaded and printed.

Figure 2.5 Training Menu

As noted in Section 1 of this manual, for organizations seeking approval status, the survey vendor’s designated HHCAHPS Survey Project Manager is required to participate in the Introduction to the HHCAHPS Survey Training. All currently approved survey vendors are required to attend all Update trainings. As noted above, all organizations and individuals planning to participate in any of the training sessions must complete the online training registration form.

When the HHCAHPS Survey Coordination Team receives a completed registration form, the project website will send an automatic e-mail to acknowledge and confirm the registration. A second e-mail will be sent to survey vendors only (not to vendor subcontractors, HHAs, or other nonsurvey vendor registrants) prior to the Introduction to HHCAHPS training session that will contain a link with an embedded unique identifier that the survey vendor’s HHCAHPS Project Manager must use to complete the certification after the training. The certification will be posted on the HHCAHPS Survey website and made available soon after the Webinar training.

2.2.3 Forms for Vendors Menu

The Forms for Vendors menu (Figure 2.6) includes a link to the Vendor Registration form and the Model Quality Assurance Plan (QAP).

Figure 2.6 Forms for Vendors Menu
The Vendor Registration link allows vendors to gain access to the Vendor Participation Form, an online application that must be completed by vendors interested in becoming an approved HHCAHPS Survey vendor. Vendors must first register for login credentials before they can access the Vendor Participation Form, which is housed on the private side of the website. Once a vendor has been approved by CMS, the Coordination Team mails the vendor’s Survey Administrator (as named in the Participation Form) a Consent Form that must be completed, signed, notarized, and sent to the Coordination Team so that the vendor can be granted access to the rest of the private links on the website. The second link under this menu, the Model QAP, is a sample QAP outline that approved survey vendors should use as a guide when completing their own QAP.

2.2.4 Survey and Protocols Menu

The Survey and Protocols menu (see Figure 2.7) includes forms and materials that approved HHCAHPS Survey vendors will use to administer the HHCAHPS Survey. The forms and materials available at this link are described below.

- Protocols and Guidelines Manual—provides guidance and standard protocols for conducting the HHCAHPS Survey.
- Questionnaire—contains links to the HHCAHPS mail survey instrument, in various languages (English, Spanish, simplified and traditional Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, and Armenian).
- Supplemental Questions—provides additional questions that vendors may use if an HHA desires.
- Consent to Share Responses—provides text for vendors to use if HHAs wish to add a question to allow vendors to share identified responses with the HHA (assuming that the respondent consents).
- Survey Composites—identifies measures containing two or more questions about a related topic that are reported together. The HHCAHPS Survey results that will be publicly reported will be the composite scores, not percentages for individual survey questions.
- Sample Letters—provides sample text for letters to send with the mail survey questionnaire.
- Telephone Scripts—contains scripts for telephone interviewers to use.
- FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) for Interviewers—provides answers for many of the common questions posed to telephone interviewers by sample members.
- OMB Disclosure Notice—contains the Office of Management and Budget disclosure statement.

All of the survey administration materials are provided in multiple languages (at this time, English, Spanish, simplified and traditional Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese, and Armenian versions of the mail survey instrument are available; the telephone scripts are available in all of those languages except Chinese and Armenian).
2.2.5 The Data Submission Menu

Figure 2.8 shows the links containing data submission forms/materials that are available on the public side of the website (additional links under this menu are accessible on the private site for credentialed users). The following is a brief description of the links under the Data Submission Menu.

- Data Submission Deadlines—shows the deadline for uploading HHCAHPS Survey data files for each of the next four upcoming calendar year quarters.
- User Manual—The Website User and Data Submission Manual provides information on the functions and uses of the HHCAHPS Survey website, including both public and private links available to vendors and HHAs.
- Extensible markup language (XML) File Layout—specifies the format of HHCAHPS Survey data files.
- XML Sample File—contains a sample data file that survey vendors can use to construct the monthly sample frames for the HHCAHPS Survey.
- XML File Schema—provides the XSD file that vendors can use to construct or validate their XML files.
Please refer to the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual for more information about data submission deadlines and sample file layouts. The data submission deadlines are posted on the project website at https://homehealthcahps.org/DataSubmission/DataSubmissionDeadlines.aspx and are updated regularly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter and Year</th>
<th>Data Submission Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 4, 2018</td>
<td>April 18, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 1, 2019</td>
<td>July 18, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 2, 2019</td>
<td>October 17, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 3, 2019</td>
<td>January 16, 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarter 4, 2019</td>
<td>April 16, 2020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 The Private Links on the HHCAHPS Survey Website

The HHCAHPS Survey private website menu options differ slightly from those on the public website. To log into the secure portion of the website, all users must first establish a registered account. More information about registering for an account is provided on the website and in Chapter XI in the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual, which can be obtained from the public side of the website. Several of the menus on the navigation bar include additional links that allow users to perform various functions and provide information specific to authorized vendors and HHAs. The remainder of this section is focused on survey vendor users, with detailed private links information for HHAs provided in Section 6.

2.3.1 Survey Vendor Dashboard

The HHCAHPS website includes custom dashboard views for survey vendors and HHAs. Each dashboard features links of relevant to the user. Figure 2.9 shows the Vendor Dashboard view once a user has selected the Dashboard menu.

The “Dashboard” view provides survey vendors with the status of key elements of the Vendor Approval Process—including the status of and links to their vendor application, consent form, and overall approval status; a User console, showing administrative users within the organization; Recent Announcements; and links to both data submission reports and reports showing the HHAs that have authorized them.
Figure 2.9  Vendor Dashboard View
2.3.2 Forms for Vendors—Private Links

**Figure 2.10** displays the links under the Forms for Vendors menu that appear when an approved survey vendor user is logged into the site.

- Exceptions Request Form—approved survey vendors must complete to request a planned deviation from standard survey administration protocols.
- Discrepancy Notification Report Form—approved survey vendors must complete and submit for any unplanned deviations from survey administration protocol.
- Model Quality Assurance Plan—as previously noted, this is an outline that vendors should use to develop their own QAP for submission to the HHCAHPS Coordination Team.
- Submit Quality Assurance Plan—an online tool that approved survey vendors will use to submit (and subsequently update) their QAP, within 6 weeks after their first HHCAHPS data file is submitted to the HHCAHPS Data Center.
- Survey Vendor Authorization Report—allows survey vendors to see which HHAs have authorized them to submit data.
- Manage Users—allows the vendor’s CAHPS survey administrator to create/edit/remove backup and non-administrative users.

**Figure 2.10  Forms for Vendors Menu—Private Side**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Vendor Dashboard</th>
<th>General Information</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Forms for Vendors</th>
<th>Survey and Protocols</th>
<th>Data Submission</th>
<th>For HHAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2.3.3 Data Submission Menu—Private Links

**Figure 2.11** shows both the public and private links under the Data Submission menu. There are two private links under this menu—the ”Submit Data” link and the ”Data Submissions Reports” link.
Figure 2.11 Submit Data Menu—Private Side

The “Submit Data” link contains a submenu with the “Link to Submission Tool,” which is where survey vendors browse for, select, and then upload their monthly XML files to the Data Center. The last link under the Data Submission menu is the “Data Submission Reports” link (see Figure 2.12). There are three links under the Data Submission Reports menu item. These three reports provide the vendor with historical information about its data file submissions. Please refer to Chapter XI of the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual for a description and use of these three reports. The “Helpful Submission Tips” provides information to help approved survey vendors avoid problems when uploading files containing HHCAHPS Survey data.

Figure 2.12 View Data Submission Reports Menu—Private Side
This page intentionally left blank.
3. System and Security Requirements for the HHCAHPS Website

3.1 Overview of System and Security Requirements

Approved survey vendors submit or upload HHCAHPS Survey data to the HHCAHPS Data Center through a link on the HHCAHPS Survey website. This chapter provides information on the minimum technology required for the upload process. To use the HHCAHPS Survey website vendors must have, at a minimum, the following equipment and software:

- Internet Explorer Version 9, Mozilla Firefox or Google Chrome
- An Internet Service Provider

In addition, the security level for users’ browser Internet zone must be set to the equivalent of medium or lower, at least during the time that they are working in the project website.

3.2 HHCAHPS Website Data Security

HHCAHPS Survey vendors can submit only de-identified data files to the HHCAHPS Data Center. Although only de-identified data are submitted, ensuring data security was a major concern and consideration during the design and development of the HHCAHPS Survey website. The website balances a straightforward and flexible design with the need to protect the privacy and security of HHCAHPS Survey data. Data are encrypted whenever vendors upload their data files. The HHCAHPS Coordination Team has implemented policies and procedures to ensure that all communications and transfers are secure. These measures include:

- requiring that each individual provided access to the private links on the website has a secure login to the private side of the website;
- requiring users to create and use a strong password;
- using Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology to encrypt files for transmission; and
- carefully monitoring uploads, upload attempts, and website use on an ongoing basis.

When users log into the private links on the website, the system automatically checks and authenticates their credentials before allowing access. This ensures that only authorized users log into the system.

In addition to allowing only credentialed users access to the private links on the website, all electronic data are stored behind a firewall in a password-protected network. All data traffic between the vendor’s network and the Internet pass through this single
connection point. This process provides the same level of protection and monitoring to all systems connected to the survey vendor’s network. The website firewall is programmed to allow or prevent access to the network by using a set of rules to determine whether attempted network access is compliant with the Data Center’s network security policy. In addition, the firewall logs all incoming traffic to help detect and analyze any problems or suspicious activity.

3.3 Survey Vendor Website Security Responsibilities

All approved HHCAHPS survey vendors must adhere to strict website data security requirements to continue their participation. By following the HHCAHPS security procedures, survey vendors will protect their client HHAs’ data and those of other vendors participating in the HHCAHPS Survey.

When issued credentials to access the private links on the project website, approved survey vendors must follow all safeguards to prevent an unauthorized person from entering the private side of the website. The website password protection system requires that approved survey vendors follow the password guidelines listed below.

• When a survey vendor’s account is approved, the user will be required to log into the system and change the password on first login.
• Each account will be locked out after five successive incorrect password entries. If the account is locked, the user will need to contact the Coordination Team to have the account unlocked.
• If a user’s password is compromised or lost, contact the Coordination Team immediately to ask that the account be deactivated. The Coordination Team will then issue new credentials to the user.
• When survey vendors and HHAs generate a password to access the private links on the project website, they must develop a strong password. A strong password is defined as one that contains at least nine (9) characters. These nine characters must include the following:
  – one upper-case alphabet letter,
  – one numeral, and
  – one special character (&, %, #, !).

An example of a strong password is Mgh0721$&; it meets the required criteria shown above.

These password rules and guidelines are designed to minimize the chance that automated password-cracking routines used by unauthorized personnel can gain access to the website. In addition to the above rules, the following guidelines will help create a strong password:
• Combine two or more related words with punctuation, such as Radio-Cook.
• Use a password that looks like nonsense but allows an easy way to remember it, such as “Thaawtsom.” for “The hills are alive with the sound of music.” (Note the end punctuation.)
• Think in terms of vanity license plates, such as “I8myfood.”

The following should be avoided when creating a password:
• do not use a single English word;
• do not use a scientific name, biological term, or geographic name; and
• do not use a person’s name or part of name, even with slight modifications like an added character at the end or beginning.

In addition, do not use the following items in the password:
• known combinations (e.g., NLRB 1234, attorney1, judge111);
• words found in a dictionary, including names, obscene words, or well-known phrases;
• a password with a repeating series of characters;
• reverse spellings of dictionary words;
• a name associated with the user in any way (middle name, family names, pet’s name, sports team name, films, etc.);
• portions of a User ID on the current or other systems; or
• simple keyboard patterns (e.g., “asdfjkl.”).

A user should never write down his or her password. If the user needs to store passwords, there are free applications that can be downloaded and used. An application like this can be very helpful because another password safety rule is to never use the same password across applications or computers. Finally, do not share or give the password to anyone. All HHCAHPS users are responsible for all access to the private links on the project website that are made under their credentials.

3.4 What to Do If a User Forgets the Password

If a user forgets his or her password, simply click on the Reset Password link on the Login menu on the HHCAHPS Survey website. HHCAHPS Survey vendors can request a password reset by providing their Username. HHCAHPS Data Center project staff will send a password reset link to the user via the e-mail address provided when the user first registered for access credentials. When the e-mail containing the password reset is received, the user should log in and follow the directions to create a new password.

3.5 Managing the HHCAHPS Website Survey Vendor Account and Profile

HHCAHPS Survey vendors may need to update information in their user account as circumstances change or information about HHCAHPS Survey personnel or the organization
changes over time. An approved user can edit their account information at any time after logging in by clicking on his or her name displayed in the upper right corner of the private side of the website. Once the username is clicked, the user should then click on the “Edit profile” link, which will bring up the screen called Manage Account (depicted in Figure 3.1). The Manage Account screen contains two tabs: Manage Account and Manage Profile. The Manage Account tab contains the following information:

- Login Username;
- Display Name; and
- Contact E-mail Address.

Figure 3.1 Manage Account
Approved survey vendors can change information in their profile by going to the Manage Profile tab (see Figure 3.2) and making edits in the available fields. As noted in Section 1 of this manual, a website user can contact the Coordination Team by sending an e-mail or calling the toll-free project number to get help establishing a username or setting up an account to access the private links in the system. Users should notify the Coordination Team immediately if they suspect that there has been a breach in security in their own data system.

Figure 3.2  Manage Profile
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4. Using an XML Template to Submit HHCAHPS Data Files

4.1 Overview

This section contains information about preparing HHCAHPS Survey data files for submission to the Data Center. After reviewing this information, HHCAHPS Survey vendors will know how to clean and successfully format XML HHCAHPS data files in preparation to submit them via the HHCAHPS website. If any problems occur when submitting data to the Data Center, the Coordination Team will be available to work with survey vendors to resolve the problems. The Coordination Team can be reached by telephone at 1-866-354-0985 or by e-mail to hhcahps@rti.org.

4.2 Format and Clean Survey Data Following the XML File Specifications

Survey vendors can submit data only in the XML format. Each XML file should contain only 1 month of survey data, with one file for each HHA. The HHCAHPS Survey XML file structure is included in Appendix N of the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual. The specifications in that document contain details about the data to be submitted such as data type, field sizes, and order. The format of each HHCAHPS Survey data file must match the specification provided in that Appendix. Survey vendors can also download the XML data file template from the HHCAHPS Survey website. The XML templates were developed based on data elements needed for analysis and on the HHCAHPS Survey questionnaire.

The XML file format will allow data for all patients sampled during a given sample month to be submitted in one file. Survey vendors should note that if a data file for a sample month is submitted more than once, the most recent data submission will overwrite the file previously submitted for that sample month. Therefore, the final file submission must contain data for all patients who were sampled in that sample month for a specific HHA. Detailed information about the data submission process can be found in Chapter X of the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual.

The data file layouts for HHCAHPS Survey XML files described below are included in Appendices N and O of the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual. Appendix N contains the XML Data File Layout for the Standard Header Record, which is used with simple and proportionate random sampling methods. If disproportionate stratified random sampling (DSRS) is used, survey vendors must use the DSRS Data File Layout (found in Appendix O). Vendors can also download the XML data file specifications templates from the HHCAHPS Survey website.

Each XML file will consist of three sections: a Header Record, a Patient Administrative Data Record, and a Patient Response Record. There should be only one header record for each HHCAHPS XML file. Each patient within the XML file should have an administrative data
record. A survey response record must be included for every sampled patient who completed the survey questionnaire.

4.2.1 Header Record

The Header Record contains the identifying information for the HHA corresponding to data included on the file, sampling information, survey administration mode, and the method by which the sample was selected. Information required in this section includes the name of the HHA and its CMS Certification Number (CCN). Other sampling information required in the Header Record is shown below.

- Sample Year—the calendar year in which the survey is being conducted.
- Sample Month—the month for which the sample was selected. Survey vendors will select a sample of patients who meet survey eligibility criteria for each calendar month.
- Mode of Survey Administration—the method by which the survey was administered. The survey mode, either mail only (1), phone only (2), or mixed mode (3), must be the same for all patients in each sample month in the calendar quarter for each HHA. HHAs and their survey vendors cannot change survey administration modes until a new quarter begins.
- Type of Sampling—the sampling method that was used to select the sample. These include census, simple random sampling (SRS), proportionate stratified random sampling (PSRS), and DSRS. See Chapter IV in the Protocols and Guidelines Manual for detailed information about each of these methods.
- Number of Patients Served—the number of patients who had at least one visit for skilled care at any point during the sample month, regardless of whether they are eligible for the HHCAHPS Survey. In other words, this number should include both patients who are eligible for the survey and those who are not.
- Number of Patients on the File Submitted by the HHA—the HHA must provide a list of all patients served during the sample month to the survey vendor, with the exception of those patients whose care was not paid for by Medicare or Medicaid, those who are deceased, are not 18 years old or older, currently receive hospice care, received home health care for routine maternity care only, and those who requested that the HHA not release their name to anyone outside the HHA.
- Number of Eligible Patients—the number of patients on the sample frame provided by the HHA who meet survey eligibility criteria in the sample month.
- Number of Patients Sampled—the number of patients selected for the survey during the sample month.

DSRS Sampling. Vendors with HHA clients seeking to use DSRS sampling must complete and submit an Exceptions Request Form to the Coordination Team prior to sampling (see Chapter IV of the Protocols and Guidelines Manual for more information about the Exceptions Request Form). If a vendor submits a data file with a DSRS Header record and does not have prior approval for using DSRS, the data file will be rejected. More information about DSRS and requirements for DSRS sample selection and file construction is provided in the Protocols and Guidelines Manual (Chapters IV and X).
If DSRS is used, survey vendors must include the following information in the Header Record:

- DSRS Stratum Name—note that there must be at least two strata identified for DSRS sampling).
- DSRS No. of Patients on file submitted to vendor—the number of patients included on the file that the HHA provided for this stratum.
- DSRS No. of Patients eligible in stratum—the number of patients who meet survey eligibility criteria within each stratum.
- DSRS No. of Patients sampled in stratum—the number of patients sampled within the stratum.
- Note that all fields in the Header Record must have an entry except the fields for the National Provider ID (NPI) number and for DSRS.

4.2.2 Patient Administrative Record

The second section of the XML file contains data about each patient who was sampled for the sample month, including both those who responded to the survey and nonrespondents. In this section of the file, some of the information provided in the Header Record is repeated, including the HHA’s CCN and the Sample Year and Sample Month. All other information included in this section of the file is about the patient. There must be a Patient Administrative Record for every patient sampled in the sample month. HHCAHPS Survey vendors are required to assign a unique sample identification (SID) number to each sampled patient included in the survey, regardless of whether the sample member completed the survey. More information about assigning a unique SID to each sampled patient is included in Chapter IV of the HHCAHPS Protocols and Guidelines Manual.

All files submitted with missing SID numbers will be rejected during the upload process.

Most of the information required in the Patient Administrative Data Record should be provided to the HHCAHPS Survey vendor by the HHA on the monthly patient file. This information includes the patient’s age (the survey vendor will calculate the patient’s age based on the date of birth provided by the HHA), the patient’s sex, the number of skilled visits the patient had in the sample month, payer information, admission source, activities of daily living (ADLs), and diagnoses/condition information. The information in the last part of this section is survey administration data, including the final disposition code assigned to each case, a flag to indicate whether the survey was completed by a proxy respondent, and the number of supplemental items the HHA added.

It is the vendor’s responsibility to flag all surveys completed with a proxy respondent as a “proxy” interview. For telephone interviews, it is the vendor’s responsibility to assign a flag to those cases completed with a proxy respondent. For mail questionnaires, the vendor
must assign a proxy flag to any case where the respondent indicated in Question 34 that the person helping him or her “answered the questions for me” (response option 3).

4.2.3 Patient Response Record

The third section of the XML file is the patient response record, which contains the responses to the HHCAHPS Survey from every patient who answered the survey during the sample month. Users should submit only data corresponding to the HHCAHPS Survey questions. Do not submit responses to questions that were added by the HHA (non-HHCAHPS questions), and do not submit responses to the HHCAHPS supplemental questions, if they were included in the survey. The only response records that survey vendors should include are those with a final survey disposition code for a completed survey (Codes 110 and 120) and those with Code 310 (Break-Off). For all survey data records that are included, all response fields must have a legitimate value. Legitimate values can include “Missing” or “Not applicable.”
5. Submitting Data to the HHCAHPS Data Center

5.1 Overview

This chapter describes the process to submit data via the HHCAHPS Survey website and the reports available to survey vendors and HHAs to ensure that this process is completed successfully.

5.2 Submitting Data

To submit data on the HHCAHPS website, approved HHCAHPS Survey vendors will need to first log into the secure portion of the website with their unique password and user ID. Survey vendors can submit data files to the HHCAHPS Data Center in one of two ways, as a single XML file or as a ZIP file containing multiple XML files.

Prior to submitting XML data files, vendors can test their data files with the “XML Schema Validation Tool” posted on the HHCAHPS website. The Validation Tool is formatted in accordance with the XML Data File Specifications that are described in the sections that follow, and vendors should make sure that they have reviewed these specifications prior to submission. The Validation Tool also contains some, but not all, of the same validation checks that are applied when the data file is submitted to the Data Center. Using the Validation Tool to identify file problems and correcting any problems detected will reduce the number of attempts to submit the data file.

Follow the steps below to submit data via the project website:

1. Log on to the HHCAHPS Survey website and then locate the “Submit Data” link under the Data Submission menu on the private side of the website.

2. Select “Submit Data” from the dropdown menu and then select “Link to Data Submission Tool” (see Figure 5.1 below). The user will be taken to the data submission tool page.

3. Click the “Select” button to select the file to upload. The select button permits users to locate and directly upload a file that has been saved in their own computer system. Survey vendors can select either a single XML file or a single ZIP file that contains multiple XML files.

4. After selecting the file to be uploaded, click “Upload XML” to submit the file. The Data Upload Summary Report based on the file selected will appear. A link to this report will also be e-mailed to the person within the vendor’s organization entered as the vendor’s point of contact (POC) when the vendor registered for credentials to access the private links on the website.

5. If a user wants to upload more than one file at a time, click the “Add” button on the same screen. This will add additional file selection rows. Repeat Step 3 for each file to be uploaded.

6. If the user has added rows and wishes to remove them, click the “Remove” button to the right of the row to be deleted.
As the upload begins, the XML file will undergo several validation checks, first to determine whether the CCN for the client HHA matches the CCN listed as having authorized the survey vendor submitting the data file and then to determine the quality and completeness of the data. If the file fails any of the validation checks, the survey vendor will receive an error message after a file error is detected noting that the file upload did not take place and giving details on why the file failed to upload. For example, the message may indicate that there is no authorization from the HHA for the vendor to submit data on its behalf or that the number of patient records listed in the Header does not match the number of sample patients for which data are provided in the Patient Administrative Data Record section of the file. **Figure 5.2** shows how the screen looks when submitting multiple files for uploading to the private side of the website.

Because the data submission validation procedures require time to process HHCAHPS data files, survey vendors are strongly advised to submit files far enough in advance of the quarterly submission deadline to allow for both the initial upload file check and the data processing check, in the event they are required to resubmit a file because the file failed the validation process. CMS will not accept revised or resubmitted files after the data submission deadline. Please submit files far enough before the deadline to allow for resubmissions if needed.
5.3 Review and Follow-up on Data Upload Reports

Four reports are available to survey vendors via the HHCAHPS Survey website. These reports serve to inform survey vendors about the outcome of each of the vendor’s data file upload attempts, and they also provide the vendor with a history of upload efforts, successful or unsuccessful. The four reports are listed below:

- Data Submission Summary Report
- Data Submission History Report
- Data Submission History by Upload Date
- APU Participation Summary Report

Each of these reports is described below.

5.3.1 Data Submission Summary Report

This report will be available immediately once the survey vendor has uploaded data via the Submit Data link on the HHCAHPS Survey website. Once the survey vendor uploads
a data file or files, the system will check for the correct file layout, missing data, duplicate SID numbers, invalid responses, etc. An example of this report is shown in Figure 5.3.

**Figure 5.3  Data Submission Summary Report**

![Validation Results Report](image)

The first/initial check of the submitted data file is to make sure that the XML template has been used and is properly formatted. If any of a survey vendor’s data files has an incorrectly formatted template, the data upload process will stop immediately and send an error message to the survey vendor that describes the problem detected. After the system verifies that a properly formatted template has been used, it begins a series of data checks which look for any fields in the Header Record with missing data. If any required data are missing, the file will be rejected, and the Data Submission Summary Report will let the survey vendor know what data fields are missing. The system will also check for any duplicate SIDs to make sure that the same SID has not been used more than once for a given HHA in a quarter. If a vendor has used a duplicate SID, the file will be rejected. This report will identify where the error is located so it can be corrected. Finally, the report will check to make sure that the survey vendor has been authorized by the HHA for which a data file is being loaded to submit data on the HHA’s behalf.

If the data file successfully passes these initial checks, the system will take the user to a screen that will display a message indicating that the file upload was successful. This screen will also provide the survey vendor with a count of records received by CCN. The message will also indicate that the file will be sent through a more formal overnight data
processing step. HHCAHPS Survey vendors will be notified via e-mail within 24 hours that a report of the results of this second data processing step is available to the vendor on the HHCAHPS Survey website.

The Data Submission Summary report is updated to reflect the result of running the overnight set of machine edits on all recently submitted files, an example of which is shown in **Figure 5.4**. The machine edits will check for missing data fields required for patient eligibility determination, including the number of visits over the lookback period, payer, patient admission date, or patient age. The process will also check each patient survey data record included on the file to ensure that all entries are within the acceptable range. A completeness algorithm will be run to verify that all patient survey data records included on the file meet survey completeness criteria.

**Figure 5.4 Updated Data Submission Summary Report**

Following completion of all edit checks, the data submission system will generate and send an e-mail to the survey vendor indicating that this data processing step has been completed. This e-mail will include a link that will take the user to the survey vendor’s updated Data Submission Summary Report. The report will be identical to the original report, but it will include more detailed information about the checks that were performed during the nightly process. The report will provide the survey vendor with sufficient detail, by CCN, of data file errors that caused data files to be rejected so that the vendor can correct the errors and resubmit the file(s). The report will also indicate which of the vendor’s data files have successfully passed this second set of edit checks.

Once the data files successfully pass this second “overnight” check, the vendor’s data submission is considered successful and the files will be accepted and processed for public reporting. If all of the records for a given CCN are accepted, the vendor does not need to resubmit that file. However, if a vendor submits a file for multiple CCNs and there are one
or more invalid records for a given CCN, the vendor will need to resubmit a file containing all records for the CCN that had invalid records.

### 5.3.2 Data Submission History Reports

HHCAHPS Survey vendors will be able to view a history of their data submission activities via two reports under the Data Submission Report menu option: *Data Submission History* and *Data Submission History by Upload Date*. The *Data Submission History* report allows vendors to see a summary or detailed list of data submission activity. The *Data Submission History by Upload Date* allows vendors to search for a data submission report by the actual file upload date.

### 5.3.3 APU Participation Summary Report

The purpose of the APU Participation Summary Report is to allow vendors get a summary view of all files that they have uploaded for their clients, organized by each APU summary period. This report will indicate each month within the APU period that a data file has been successfully submitted to the data center, per agency (as shown in Figure 5.5). Vendors can quickly get a summary view of the submission status for each of their clients.

#### Figure 5.5 APU Participation Summary Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 1</td>
<td>142193</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 2</td>
<td>333250</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 3</td>
<td>267140</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 4</td>
<td>149325</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 5</td>
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<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 6</td>
<td>677030</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 7</td>
<td>007025</td>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 8</td>
<td>059300</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 9</td>
<td>267934</td>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 10</td>
<td>457307</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEST HHA 11</td>
<td>100450</td>
<td>Florida</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 rows in report.
6. Information for Home Health Agencies

6.1 Overview

This section contains information specific to HHAs on registering for user credentials, authorizing a vendor, and viewing data submission reports. Also covered in this section is a set of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers addressing common questions from HHAs on how to manage their user accounts. We begin this section with a description of the “For HHAs” menu, discussing several of the links under that menu in more detail.

6.1.1 The “For HHAs” Menu

The “For HHAs” menu contains links to documents/materials and reports for HHAs. The public links under this menu (see Figure 6.1) include an online form for registering for credentials needed for accessing the private links on the website. The second link is the Participation Exemption Request Form. This is for HHAs that are requesting exemption from implementing HHCAHPS because they served fewer than the number of required eligible patients (e.g., fewer than 60 eligible patients for the CY 2020 APU period).

- Register for Login Credentials—contains a link to the form that HHAs must complete to register for credentials to access the private side of the website. (When an authorized user logs on to add CCNs, the link switches to read “Register CCNs” as shown in Figure 6.2 below.)
- Participation Exemption Request Form—allows HHAs that serve fewer than 60 patients who meet survey eligibility criteria to submit a request for an exemption from participating in the HHCAHPS Survey.

More information about these links is provided in the HHCAHPS Survey Protocols and Guidelines Manual.

Figure 6.1 For HHAs Menu—Public Side

6.1.2 For HHAs Menu—Private Links

Figure 6.2 displays the private links under the For HHAs menu; a description of the private links under this menu is provided below.
Register CCNs—this is the link that appears once the authorized user has logged into the private side of the website. Clicking on this link allows users to register as their HHA’s HHCAHPS Survey Administrator.

Participation Exemption Request Form—this link, described above, appears on both the public and private sides of the website.

Manage Users—allows the HHA’s HHCAHPS survey administrator to create/edit/remove backup and non-administrative users.

Authorize a Vendor—an online form that HHA survey administrators must complete to authorize an approved survey vendor to submit data on the agency’s behalf.

Data Submission Reports—allows HHAs to view the data submission activity of their authorized vendor.

Survey Preview Report—allows HHAs to view their publicly reported data for the 2-week period prior to the data being posted on Medicare.gov’s Home Health Compare website.

Understanding the Preview Report—provides an explanation of each of the publicly reported measures shown in the Preview Report.

### 6.1.3 HHA Dashboard

When an HHA logs into the HHCAHPS website, he or she will see the “HHA Dashboard” menu, as noted in Figure 6.3. The “Dashboard” view provides the user with links to key items on the website (such as those described in the paragraphs above) and is intended to give HHAs a quick way to manage the activities they are responsible for. HHAs are provided with links to documents required for the Registration and Vendor Authorization process, including links to the vendor authorization form; a User console, showing administrative users within the organization; Recent Announcements; and links to their data submission and latest preview reports.
Figure 6.3  HHA Dashboard View

Required Action Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency Registration</td>
<td>Completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Register one or more home health agencies (by CCN)</td>
<td>Click here to register your home health agency (by CCN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor Authorization</td>
<td>9 of 9 CCNs have current authorization</td>
<td>Authorize a Vendor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Submission

8 of 9 agencies have data successfully submitted for Quarter 2, 2018.

User Access

Administrative Users
- PSC Test Facility
- Backup Admin

Non-Administrative Users
- No users found

Information for HHAs

Home Health Agencies (HHAs) should click the appropriate link below for information about:
- Final Rule for Calendar Year 2017 (Posted 11/07/16)
- Patient Mix Adjustment Factors (Posted 12/07/16)
- Exemption from HCAHPS Participation (Posted 5/2/16)
- HCAHPS Participation Periods (Posted 11/15/16)
- Authorizing a vendor (Posted 9/4/16)
- Review Data Submission Reports (Posted 7/24/16)
- HCAHPS Survey Reports (Posted 3/2/16)

Recent Announcements

HCAHPS website will be down from 9:00AM to 11:00AM on June 20, 2017
Posted on Tuesday, June 16, 2017

The Discrepancy Notification Report: HCAHPS local template has been updated for the CY2018 ADP
Posted on Tuesday, April 25, 2017

CY15 Quarter 4 Data Submission Deadline Reminder: One Week Left
Posted on Thursday, April 13, 2017

Public Reporting Results Refreshed on Home Health Compare: Archived Publicly Reported Data Available on HHCAHPS Website
Posted on Wednesday, April 12, 2017

CY15 Q4: 4 Data Submission Deadlines Reminder
Posted on Thursday, April 6, 2017
6.1.4 Authorizing a Vendor

The online Vendor Authorization Form (see Figure 6.4) allows HHAs to perform the following four functions once they have logged in to the private side of the website:

- Authorize a vendor for an HHA for which a vendor has never been authorized.
- Change the start or end date for the current vendor.
- Change/switch to a different HHCAHPS Survey vendor.
- View the current authorization status.

A brief description and the steps in each of these functions are provided below. An automatic e-mail will be sent to the HHA confirming that the vendor has been authorized immediately after the authorization has been submitted.

Figure 6.4 HHCAHPS Vendor Authorization Form
1. **To Authorize a Vendor for an HHA for the First Time**

HHAs should select this function for one or more HHAs for which an HHCAHPS Survey vendor has never been authorized. To authorize a vendor for one or more HHAs for the first time:

- select a vendor from the dropdown list;
- select the Start Date, which is the first day of the first quarter for which the vendor is being authorized to submit HHCAHPS Survey data;
- select the agency/agencies to which the authorization applies; and
- click the “Submit” button.

2. **To Change the Date of an Existing Vendor Authorization**

This function will allow an HHA to do the following:

- select new start/end dates for an existing vendor authorization;
- select the agency/agencies to which the authorization applies; and
- click the “Submit” button.

3. **To Switch/Change to a Different HHCAHPS Vendor**

To change vendors, the HHA must first enter an End Date for the HHCAHPS vendor that was previously authorized by following the steps in Item 2 above. After selecting an End Date for the vendor that was previously authorized, the HHA must then select and authorize the new vendor by following the steps in Item 1 above. HHAs that want to switch vendors in the middle of the quarter are asked to contact the HHCAHPS Coordination Team to make sure that their vendor authorizations are correctly set up to allow their old and new vendors to submit all required files.

4. **View Current Authorization Status**

This function will allow HHAs to view the list of HHAs for which a vendor has been authorized, the current vendor’s name, and the Start Date for each vendor. If the HHA entered an End Date for the vendor currently authorized, the End Date will also show for each HHA.

5. **6.1.5 Data Submission Report for Home Health Agencies**

All HHCAHPS Survey vendors’ work is subject to review by the HHAs with which they have contracted. The *Data Submission Report* located under the “For HHAs” menu on the project website provides the HHA with detailed information about its vendor’s data submission activities (see Figure 6.5). Each HHA should review these reports on a monthly or quarterly basis, depending on the agreement that the HHA has worked out with the vendor in terms of frequency of data submission. HHAs that have contracted with a survey vendor will be able to log into the website and view or print a report that includes information on the number of submissions and the submission status of their contracted vendor’s monthly or quarterly file submissions.
The **Data Submission Report** will display the dates on which the Data Center accepted the data files the vendor submitted for the HHA. Only files that pass *both* the initial edit checks implemented during data submission and the second set of overnight edit checks (conducted within 24 hours after receipt of the file) will be listed on this report. The **Data Submission Report** will include a hyperlink embedded in the date of each submission that will take the user to the Processed Data Files Summary Report for that date.

The intent of this report is to allow an HHA to monitor whether its vendor is successfully submitting data files by the required quarterly data submission deadlines.

To protect the confidentiality of the HHA and the vendor it has selected, only the HHA and its authorized vendor will be able to view the submission history relating to that agency’s data.
6.2 Frequently Asked Questions and Answers Related to Managing User Accounts

In this section, we present a list of questions the Coordination Team frequently receives from HHAs about managing their user accounts; responses are provided for each question. Please review these carefully if you are experiencing problems conducting any of the functions on the HHCAHPS website, because it is possible that your question may be addressed here. If you attempt to correct the problem without success, please contact the Coordination Team by e-mailing hhcahps@rti.org or by calling toll-free at 866-354-0985.

Q: I lost my password. What do I do?
A: If you cannot remember your password go to the Login page. Click on the “Reset Password” button. Enter your user name and click the “Send Reset Link” button. You will receive an e-mail shortly containing a link to reset your password.

Q: My password isn’t working. What do I do?
A: You have two options:

1. From the HHCAHPS website, go to the Login page. Click on the “Reset Password” button. Enter your username and click the “Send Reset Link” button. You will receive an e-mail shortly containing a link to reset your password.

2. E-mail the HHCAHPS Coordination Team at hhcahps@rti.org and we will reset your password (you will receive an e-mail from us containing a link to reset your password).

Q: The person who registered as the Survey Administrator for our agency left, and we don’t know the password.
A: Unfortunately, if the person who was registered as the Survey Administrator did not designate a Backup Administrator within your agency, your only choice is to contact the Coordination Team at hhcahps@rti.org and request that we delete the registration. This will allow you to register a new Survey Administrator. Remember that you should have this new person designate a Backup Administrator as soon as possible.

Q: How do I designate a Backup Administrator?
A: The Survey Administrator should log onto the HHCAHPS website and select the “Manage Users” link under the “For HHAs” menu. Following the instructions on the page, the Survey Administrator should type in new users for the system and select the “role” that he or she wants the new user to have. One of the roles available is “Backup Administrator,” who will have the same privileges and access as the Survey Administrator. Note that you can have multiple Backup Administrators within an agency.
Q: My e-mail address has changed. Can you just fix this in the system so that the confirmation e-mails come to my new e-mail address?

A: The only way to change an e-mail address for your Survey Administrator in our system is to contact the HHCAHPS Coordination Team at hhcahps@rti.org and request that we delete your current registration to allow you to reregister with your valid e-mail address. We cannot change e-mail addresses for you.

Q: How do I remove access for someone in my organization who is no longer working here?

A: The person in your organization designated as the Survey Administrator or Backup Administrator can manage users (that is, add or remove users) by logging into the HHCAHPS website and selecting the “Manage Users” link under the “For HHAs” menu. A list of all users within your organization should appear, along with the option to “edit” or “delete” a user. The pencil icon is the edit icon and the “X” that is adjacent to the username is the delete icon.