



Improving or Maintaining Mental Health

Quick Reference Guide

2026

Table of Contents

MEASURE SNAPSHOT	3
How The Years Line Up	4
In One Sentence	4
CMS Cut Points	4
2026 Industry Performance	5
WHAT THE MEASURE IS ASKING	5
In Plain Language	5
Why it Exists	6
What A Care Team Actually Controls	6
The VR-12 Instrument	7
MEASURE SPECIFICATION	9
HOS Two-Year Cohort Measure	9
Commonly Misunderstood	10
HOW PERFORMANCE IS MEASURED	10
From Two Surveys to a Score	10
Internal Performance Is Not the Official Star Result	11
Adjustment and Comparability	11
HIGH-YIELD INTERVENTIONS	11
Risk Stratification — Who to Reach First	13
COMMON PITFALLS AND PRACTICAL FIXES	14
HOS Survey Integrity — What CMS Prohibits	15
BARRIERS AND EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTIONS	16
Patient-side	16
System and Workflow	17
Disparity Gaps Requiring Targeted Action	18
CLINICAL CONTEXTS AND APPLICATIONS	19
Clinical Contexts	19
Patient Journey	20
Companion Guides – Making Connections	21
DOCUMENTATION THAT SUPPORTS CARE	21
Documentation that Reflects the Care	21
What Belongs in the Record	22
Clinical Documentation Optimization – SOAP	22
Documentation Examples	23
One Status, Clearly Stated	23
KEY TAKEAWAYS	24
Changes to Monitor	25
REFERENCES	26

MEASURE SNAPSHOT

CMS Part C Star Measure: C05 - Improving or Maintaining Mental Health

CMS Definition: The percentage of sampled Medicare enrollees 65 and older whose mental health, measured by the VR-12 Mental Component Summary (MCS) score, was the **same or better than expected two years later**.¹ No pre-existing mental health diagnosis is required for inclusion in the sample.¹

FIELD	ENTRY
CMS measure name	Improving or Maintaining Mental Health, MCS
Domain	Staying Healthy: Screenings, Tests and Vaccines
CMS weighting category	Outcome Measure
Weight	1 for SY2026 (returning-measure rule); returns to 3 beginning SY2027 ¹
Primary data source	HOS survey; patient-reported, two-year cohort; HOS functional health
Unit of measurement	CMS contract-level measure; individual clinicians and practices do not receive a C05 Star Rating
Trend direction	Higher is better
Case-mix adjusted	Yes ¹
Measurement period	HOS follow-up data collection, 07/17/2024 – 11/01/2024, against 2022 baselines ¹
Recall window	The VR-12 mental health items ask about the past four weeks , at baseline, and again two years later ¹
Star measure credit	The sampled patient's two-year MCS change, compared against a case-mix-adjusted expected change. No screening completed, code billed, or referral documented independently creates credit; the measure watches whether the patient's reported mental health actually held or improved ¹
Weight trajectory	Weight 1 for SY2026 under the new-measure rule, because the measure returned from display status this cycle. The weight returns to 3 beginning with the 2027 Star Ratings ¹
Statistical method	Clustering, on case-mix-adjusted contract results. Not included in the Part C Improvement Measure and not included in the Categorical Adjustment Index ¹
Measure history	CMS substantively revised the case-mix specification beginning with 2022 data; the measure sat on display through the 2025 Star Ratings and returns to scoring for 2026. Pre-2022 results are not comparable ¹

AAVBC Knowledge Hub Premium Content Access

Continue reading your guide
with an AAVBC subscription

[Subscribe Now](#)

Already a subscriber? [Sign in](#)

Limited offer

Basic Membership Free

Includes access to downloadable Quick Reference Guides, mailing list for industry updates/medical information, research toolkits, AAVBC events and so much more!

Cancel at any time