

## Hospices Will Receive 1.8 Percent Medicare Pay Hike in 2019

By Shira Stein

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- Final rule from CMS will increase hospice payments 1.8 percent
- Agency also finalized expansion of definition for attending physicians

Medicare's payments for hospices will increase by 1.8 percent in fiscal year 2019, an increase of almost twice as much as in 2018.

The increase will result in a \$340 million hike in payments for more than 4,300 hospice providers. The final rule (RIN:0938-AT26), released by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Aug. 1, will also expand the definition of attending physicians to include physician assistants starting Jan. 1, 2019.

That expanded definition was put into place by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. The definition will allow physician assistants to establish and review the plan of care that is required for Medicare patients.

More than 1.4 million Medicare beneficiaries received hospice services in 2016 at a total cost of \$16.8 billion, according to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. The commission advises Congress on Medicare policy.

Top hospice companies that would be affected by the payment change include Miami-based Vitas Healthcare; Brentwood, Tenn.-based CLP Healthcare Services Inc.; and Toledo, Ohio-based Heartland Hospice Service.

The Medicare agency also said it is going to weigh the costs associated with a quality reporting measure against its benefits to determine whether the measure should continue to be used. This is a way the agency has been cutting quality reporting measures for other types of facilities. The agency did not cut any quality reporting measures in this rule.

The final rule will also change the way that patients can view data from the hospice quality reporting program by showing them the composite measure with a drop-down menu for the individual measure scores. This will avoid confusion when viewing the data, according to a CMS fact sheet.

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