

Joint Commission International  
Certification Standards for

# Telehealth

# **The Joint Commission Mission**

The Joint Commission's mission is to enable and affirm the highest standards of healthcare quality and safety for all.

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# Introduction (INTRO)

## About Telehealth Certification

*Joint Commission International Certification Standards for Telehealth* contains all the standards, intent statements, measurable elements of standards, and policies and procedures, as well as a glossary of key terms, for organizations seeking certification in telehealth. Joint Commission International (JCI) seeks to reflect the most current thinking in patient safety practices and concepts to help accredited and nonaccredited, as well as certified and noncertified, organizations uncover their most pressing safety risks and advance their goals for continuous quality improvement. JCI hopes to support your work of making health care as safe as possible. This introduction is designed to provide you with information on the following topics:

- The value of JCI certification
- The standards development process
- How the manual is organized
- Applying the certification standards in your organization
- How to use the standards manual

After you have a better understanding of how to use this manual, read the General Eligibility Requirements section of the “Joint Commission International Certification Process” (CERT) chapter to check whether your organization is eligible for the JCI certification. Then become familiar with the JCI standards chapters and how the standards make providing health care via telehealth services safer.

If you have questions about the standards or the accreditation or certification process, please contact JCI at [JCIAccreditation@jcrinc.com](mailto:JCIAccreditation@jcrinc.com).

## Changes to the Certification Requirements

Changes to the certification requirements, which occur for a variety of reasons, are made with input from certified organizations, health care professionals, providers, internal and external subject matter experts, consumers, and government agencies and are informed by scientific literature. New standards are added only if they relate to patient safety or quality of care, have a positive impact on health outcomes, can be accurately and readily measured, and relate to important issues that clearly support quality care, treatment, and

services. If a standard no longer reflects contemporary health care practice, commonly available technology, quality management practices, and so forth, it is revised or deleted. Standards may also be revised in response to law and regulation changes.

JCI collects information related to standards on an ongoing basis. It is current practice that the standards are revised and published as practice evolves. JCI informs accredited and certified organizations of changes made to standards between manual updates. New and revised standards are published in advance of the effective date to provide time for organizations to come into full compliance with the revised standards by the time they are effective.

## Standards Development Process

The JCI standards development process represents a collaboration between JCI, accredited and certified organizations, and international experts in quality and safety. This manual considers developments in the science of quality improvement and patient safety as well as the experiences of organizations that use telehealth best practices to improve the safety and quality of services in their organizations.

The JCI standards development team took the following actions in developing the standards for this manual:

- Analyzed recommendations and comments from JCI-accredited organizations, JCI-certified organizations, and other health care experts representing a broad range of perspectives from around the world
- Reviewed the literature for current evidence-based practices and processes and authoritative sources for industry guidelines to support new standards
- Gathered input from experts and others with specific and relevant content knowledge, including JCI surveyors and consultants
- Obtained direction from content-specific subject matter experts representing international organizations pertinent to the content area
- Sent an online field review of the revised standards to all JCI-accredited health care organizations, specifically requesting feedback from those with telehealth services, and promoted participation in the field review through social media and the JCI website

Overall, the standards development was influenced and guided by the following sources:

- Suggestions identified by subject matter experts and field reviewers to address safety and quality issues

- Evolving telehealth practices, evidence-based guidelines, global regulations, and rapidly evolving telehealth and information technologies

## The Value of JCI Certification

JCI is the world's largest health care accreditor. JCI's Gold Seal of Approval® is a widely recognized benchmark representing the most comprehensive evaluation process in the health care industry.

JCI standards are designed to help organizations do the following:

- Offer quantifiable benchmarks for quality and patient safety
- Stimulate and demonstrate continuous, sustained improvement through a reliable process
- Improve outcomes and patient experience
- Enhance efficiency
- Reduce costs through standardized care

Given those goals, JCI certification benefits your organization in the following ways:

- *Guides the management of a health care organization.* JCI designed the standards to help leaders efficiently and effectively manage the organization and how patient care services are delivered to ensure care quality and patient safety.
- *Enhances staff education.* The certification process is designed to be educational. JCI surveyors share best practice approaches and strategies that may help your telehealth organization better meet the intent of the standards and, more importantly, improve performance of day-to-day operations.
- *Helps organize and strengthen your improvement efforts.* Certification encompasses performance improvement concepts that help you continuously improve quality and standardize your processes of care, treatment, and services.
- *Gives you a competitive advantage.* Achieving certification is a visible demonstration to patients and the community that your telehealth organization is committed to providing the highest-quality, safest care and services. It also sets you apart from other telehealth organizations offering the same types of care, treatment, and services.

## What Does Certification Require?

Telehealth certification is awarded after a review that assesses an organization's commitment to improving its telehealth services. The evaluation and resulting certification decision are based on an assessment of the following:

- Compliance with the standards and measurable elements, as described in this manual
- An organized approach to performance improvement, including data collection, analysis, and implementation of actions identified to improve the organization's telehealth services

Organizations that successfully demonstrate compliance in these areas are awarded certification.

## Standards

The telehealth standards are designed to encourage interactions and communication among the caregiving team, patients, and families. They focus on key structural components necessary for safety and quality.

## The Survey

The certification evaluation involves a survey of the organization by a JCI surveyor. The survey process validates compliance with the standards through document review and through interviews with leaders and staff. During the evaluation, specific aspects of the organization are examined, including performance improvement. Organizations that meet all the requirements are certified for three years.

See the "Joint Commission International Certification Process" (CERT) chapter for more information about the survey.

## What Does This Manual Include?

This manual includes all Certification Participation Requirements (CPRs), standards, intents, and measurable elements (MEs). The standards are organized around the important functions common to all health care organizations—an approach widely used around the world, which has been validated by scientific study, testing, and application.

The manual contains three major sections:

1. Certification Participation Requirements, which outline specific requirements for participating in certification and maintaining a certification award
2. Standards related to providing patient care
3. Standards related to providing a safe, effective, and well-managed organization

The standards apply to the entire organization, as well as to each service within the organization.

In addition to the certification requirements, the manual includes this “Introduction” (INTRO) chapter, the “Joint Commission International Certification Process” (CERT) chapter, an appendix, and a glossary.

The companion *Joint Commission International Survey Process Guide for Telehealth Certification* helps telehealth organizations learn about and prepare for the JCI certification survey. During the survey, surveyors gather standards compliance information throughout the entire organization. The certification decision is based on the organization’s overall level of compliance with the standards in this manual.

Table 1. Acronyms Used in This Manual

| Acronym | Meaning  |
|---------|--|
| ATSC    | “Access to Telehealth Services and Care” chapter               |
| CERT    | “Joint Commission International Certification Process” chapter |
| CPR     | “Certification Participation Requirements” chapter             |
| E-App   | electronic application for certification                       |
| GSO     | “Governance, Strategy, and Oversight” chapter                  |
| INTRO   | “Introduction” chapter   |
| IPSG    | “International Patient Safety Goals” chapter                   |
| ISEM    | “Information Systems and Equipment Management” chapter         |
| MMR     | “Medication Management and Review” chapter                     |
| PRR     | “Patient Rights and Responsibilities” chapter                  |
| QDCI    | “Quality Data and Continuous Improvement” chapter              |
| SAFER®  | <i>Survey Analysis for Evaluating Risk®</i>                    |
| SIP     | Strategic Improvement Plan                                     |
| TSQ     | “Telehealth Staff Qualifications” chapter                      |

Certification Standards

The “**Certification Participation Requirements**” (CPR) chapter addresses specific requirements for participation in the JCI accreditation and certification process and for maintaining a certification award. For a telehealth organization seeking certification for the first time, compliance with many of the Certification Participation Requirements (CPRs) is assessed during the initial survey. For the already-certified telehealth organizations, compliance with the CPRs is assessed throughout the certification cycle, through certification surveys, the Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP), and periodic updates of organization-specific data and information.

Telehealth organizations are either compliant or not compliant with the CPRs. When an organization does not comply with certain CPRs, it may be asked to submit an SIP, or the noncompliance may result in the organization being placed in Preliminary Denial of Certification. However, refusal to permit performance of survey activities, such as limiting or denying access to authorized JCI staff (CPR.04.00), will lead to the loss or Denial of Certification. How the requirement is evaluated and the consequences of noncompliance are noted with each CPR.

The **International Patient Safety Goals (IPSGs)** promote specific improvements in patient safety. The goals highlight problematic areas in health care and describe evidence- and expert-based consensus solutions to problems related to patient safety in telehealth. Recognizing that thorough system design is intrinsic to the delivery of safe, high-quality health care, the goals generally focus on systemwide solutions whenever possible.

The **“Access to Telehealth Services and Care” (ATSC)** chapter addresses telehealth’s role as part of a continuum of care. The chapter addresses how organizations work to match their scope of services with patient needs, register patients for telehealth services, and ensure that they have obtained an accurate patient history and contribute to continuity of care. Referral services and emergency care access are also addressed.

The **“Patient Rights and Responsibilities” (PRR)** chapter addresses patients’ rights to make informed decisions about their health care. Telehealth organizations have a responsibility to provide services that meet local laws and regulations and professional expectations; this includes ensuring that the organization informs the patient of any risk and any benefit of the services being offered. Requirements regarding consent for telehealth services are addressed in this chapter.

The **“Medication Management and Review” (MMR)** chapter addresses medications as an important component of patient care. Medication management by telehealth organizations includes processes that support safe and effective medication use. This chapter includes requirements related to medication review within and between health care providers and settings.

The **“Quality Data and Continuous Improvement” (QDCI)** chapter addresses requirements about the use of quality data and the continuous improvement process in telehealth organizations. As information technology, equipment, personnel, and the environment continuously change, it will be imperative that telehealth organizations identify metrics for data collection to continuously improve their practices. The

identified metrics and continuous improvement should demonstrate leader and employee involvement to standardize processes, reduce variation and defects, or improve cycle time as a result of undesirable or plateaued data trends.

The **“Governance, Strategy, and Oversight” (GSO)** chapter addresses the strategic process and how telehealth organizations ensure proper governance of the organization and oversight of services provided. Within telehealth organizations, strategic planning involves all levels of leadership, employees, community analysis, and internal analysis and includes resource allocation and consideration for advancement of technology. These factors play a major role in the scope and vision of the telehealth organization and in the development and delivery of services. Multiple elements go into the development of an organization’s strategic plan for safely providing telehealth services.

The **“Telehealth Staff Qualifications” (TSQ)** chapter includes requirements specific to the training and qualifications of staff providing telehealth services. In addition to the organizationwide education, training, and competencies required for their assigned roles and responsibilities, staff members providing telehealth services have unique education needs. Some of the topics covered in the TSQ chapter are passwords and access privileges, phishing, security of devices, and cybersecurity. In addition, with the advancement of telehealth services and specialties, clinical privileges must align with the specific services provided and technologies used to ensure safe, high-quality patient care.

The **“Information Systems and Equipment Management” (ISEM)** chapter addresses information systems and technological equipment as a foundational part of safe, high-quality telehealth services. Organizations must consider the design, security, and usability of the patient portal; interoperability of complex systems, including electronic health records; and the functionality and maintenance of equipment used in teleradiology and treatments provided via telehealth. Telehealth also has inherent risks that must be identified and mitigated to ensure safe care delivery. This chapter addresses these extensive considerations.

## Certification Process Information

In addition to the standards chapters, the following chapters include information about the certification process, procedures, and other related information:

**“Joint Commission International Certification Process” (CERT):** Provides a description of the components of the certification process, current information on general eligibility requirements, how to apply for certification, and what to expect after the survey. The certification decision categories are also explained.

**“Appendix A: Additional Requirements for Programs That Are Not Part of a Currently JCI-Accredited Organization” (AXA):** Includes additional requirements from the Hospital Accreditation Program that organizations must comply with if they are not accredited.

**“Glossary” (GL):** Provides definitions of many terms used throughout the manual.

## What Do The Standards Chapters Include?

The standards chapters contain the following elements:

- *Overview:* The overview is located at the beginning of each chapter. The overview explains the chapter’s purpose and the principles on which the standards were built.
- *Chapter outline:* This part shows how the chapter is laid out and provides a frame of reference for the numbering of standards.
- *Standards:* Standards (also known as requirements) are statements that define the performance expectations and/or structures or functions that must be in place for an organization to be certified by JCI and provide safe, high-quality care, treatment, and services. Standards are evaluated for compliance during the survey.
- *Intent:* An intent helps explain the full meaning of a standard by providing additional background, justification, or other information. The intent describes the purpose or reason for the standard and how it fits into the overall program, setting parameters for what is required by the standard. The intent is considered advisory, and it is not scored. However, lettered lists in the intent statement do include required elements that must be in place to meet the standard and are addressed in the measurable elements of the standard (*see below*).
- *Measurable elements (MEs):* MEs are statements that detail the specific performance expectations, structures, functions, or processes that must be in place for an organization to meet the standard and provide high-quality care, treatment, and services. MEs are reviewed during the survey and assigned a score that determines an organization’s overall compliance with a standard. Organizations can use MEs to bring clarity to standards, help the organization fully understand the requirements, guide the organization in certification preparation, and educate executive leaders, service leaders, health care providers, and staff about the standards.

- **Examples:** Examples are included in many standards' intents to better illustrate expectations for compliance. Examples are considered advisory and are not required or scored.
- **Notes:** Occasionally, notes are used to provide organizations and surveyors with additional or clarifying information. A note may provide applicability information, define a term, or explain a concept. (All key terms are defined in the "Glossary" [GL] in the back of this manual.)
- **Icons:** Some measurable elements are preceded by a documentation—ⓓ—icon. Such measurable elements require the telehealth organization to have a written policy, procedure, program, or other written document for specific processes. Some policies, procedures, programs, and written documents are required to be translated to English for the survey. These are identified in the Required Documents section of the *Joint Commission International Survey Process Guide for Telehealth Certification*.
- **Cross-references:** Placed in parentheses following a statement or paragraph within an intent, a cross-reference helps identify a related standard(s), whether it is located in the same chapter or a different chapter. These cross-references should help the user quickly find related content concerning the topic of a particular standard.

## Applying the Standards in Your Organization

Although each standard applies to all applicant telehealth organizations, there is a special circumstance when considering how to apply standards in an individual telehealth organization.

### Adhering to the Stricter Standard

A telehealth organization must establish policies and procedures that conform to national, regional, and local laws or regulations as well as JCI standards. When a concept is addressed by the JCI standards and by the laws or regulations of a national or local authority, JCI requires that an organization follow whichever body has set the *higher* or *stricter* requirement. For example, JCI requires that organizations use two patient identifiers in a variety of processes. If the telehealth organization's national standard requires the use of three identifiers, the organization must use three identifiers to meet the national standard, which is stricter than JCI's standard. However, if that same national standard allows the use of home address as an identifier—a practice JCI

explicitly prohibits—the organization is prohibited from doing so. In this case, the organization would need to use three identifiers (the stricter national requirement) and would be prohibited from using home address as an identifier (the stricter JCI requirement).

## Keys to Using This Manual Successfully

*Joint Commission International Certification Standards for Telehealth*; its companion book, *Joint Commission International Survey Process Guide for Telehealth Certification*; and information on the *JCI Direct Connect* extranet site contain all the information a telehealth organization needs to achieve and maintain continuous compliance with JCI telehealth certification standards.

Communicating critical information to staff and maintaining continuous compliance with JCI standards are the keys to ensuring that safe, high-quality care is provided to patients—yet these goals present a real challenge for many organizations. Following are some helpful suggestions for successfully achieving continuous compliance with the standards outlined in this certification manual.

- *Become familiar with the standards.* Review the important functions of a telehealth organization identified in the titles of the standards chapters. Become aware of those standards that all organizations must meet to be certified by JCI and review the compliance expectations of the standards as well as those of the additional requirements found in the associated intents and MEs. Become familiar with the terminology used in the manual. Identify those standards that require documentation (also outlined in the *Joint Commission International Survey Process Guide for Telehealth Certification*) and make sure you have the needed documentation to maintain compliance.
- *Visit your organization's JCI Direct Connect extranet site.* Become aware of the certification policies and procedures and the certification process. Discover how to find the information you need about an upcoming survey or a revised requirement.
- *Use the standards to improve care, treatment, and services.* Do not view certification standards as rules that must be followed just for JCI surveys. Instead, incorporate tasks and processes that help integrate these concepts into your daily operations because they directly affect the safety of patients and the quality of care, treatment, and services you provide. As you self-assess your compliance with JCI standards, identify follow-up actions needed to bring your organization into compliance and meet the needs of your patients for safe, high-quality care.

JCI's certification policies and procedures, as well as information about JCI's telehealth certification process—including the presurvey, survey, and postsurvey activities—can be found in their entirety on your secure *JCI Direct Connect* extranet site. They are also summarized in this manual.