

Understanding the CMS measure POLY-ACH: A guide for providers

Polypharmacy: Use of Multiple Anticholinergic Medications in Older Adults (POLY-ACH) is a new Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) star measure starting in measurement year (MY) 2025. Health care providers must keep up to date with CMS measures to deliver high-quality care and meet regulatory compliance standards.

What is the POLY-ACH measure?

The CMS star measure Polypharmacy: Use of Multiple Anticholinergic Medications in Older Adults monitors the percentage of Medicare Part D beneficiaries aged 65 years or older prescribed two or more unique anticholinergic medications on different dates of service during the measurement year. This measure aims to reduce the anticholinergic burden, which can harm cognition and increase risks for falls and mortality.

Why is the POLY-ACH measure important?

There is a greater risk of adverse drug reactions due to metabolic changes and reduced drug clearance associated with aging. Anticholinergic medications can cause confusion, dry mouth, blurred vision, constipation and urinary retention. These can lead to increased risk of impaired cognitive and physical function, as well as falls in older adults.¹

- A JAMA Internal Medicine study linked anticholinergic use to a higher risk of dementia ¹.
- Older adults are more vulnerable to adverse drug events due to polypharmacy and reduced physiological reserve ².
- Reducing unnecessary anticholinergic medications improves functional outcomes and quality of life ³.

Patients excluded from POLY-ACH measure

- Patients enrolled in hospice at any time during the measurement period.

Best practices and tips for success

- Medication review and deprescribing
 - Regularly review all medications, prioritizing deprescribing of anticholinergics with the highest risk ⁴.
- Non-pharmacologic and safer alternatives
 - For insomnia, recommend CBT-I or melatonin.
 - For urinary incontinence, encourage pelvic floor exercises and bladder training ⁶.
- Anticholinergic burden assessment tools:

- Use tools like the Anticholinergic Cognitive Burden (ACB) Scale to evaluate and reduce medication risk ⁵.
- Patient and caregiver education
 - Clearly explain the risks of anticholinergic medications and provide alternatives. Engage patients in shared decision-making.
- Collaborative care:
 - Partner with pharmacists and geriatric specialists to optimize regimens and ensure safe prescribing practices.

Please visit the CMS website or contact our quality improvement team for further information and resources on the POLY-ACH measure.

Measure medications:

Antihistamine medications

brompheniramine	cyproheptadine	diphenhydramine (oral)	pyrilamine
carbinoxamine	dexbrompheniramine	doxylamine	triprolidine
chlorpheniramine	dexchlorpheniramine	hydroxyzine	
clemastine	dimenhydrinate	meclizine	

Antiarrhythmic medications

disopyramide

Antidepressant medications

amitriptyline	doxepin (>6 mg/day)	paroxetine
amoxapine	imipramine	protriptyline
clomipramine	nortriptyline	trimipramine

Antiemetic medications

prochlorperazine	promethazine
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Antimuscarinic (urinary incontinence) medications

darifenacin	flavoxate	solifenacin	trospium
fesoterodine	oxybutynin	tolterodine	

Antiparkinsonian agent medications

benztropine	trihexyphenidyl
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Antipsychotic medications

chlorpromazine	loxapine	perphenazine	trifluoperazine
clozapine	olanzapine	thioridazine	

Antispasmodic medications

atropine (excludes ophthalmic)	dicyclomine	methscopolamine
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belladonna alkaloids	homatropine (excludes ophthalmic)	propantheline
clidinium- chlordiazepoxide	hyoscyamine	scopolamine (excludes ophthalmic)
Skeletal muscle relaxant medications		
cyclobenzaprine	orphenadrine	

References:

1. Gray, S. L., et al. (2015). Anticholinergic Use and Dementia Risk. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 175(3), 401-407.
2. Boustani, M., et al. (2008). Impact of Anticholinergics on Aging Brains. *Aging Health*, 4(3), 311-320.
3. Rochon, P. A., et al. (2018). Polypharmacy in Older Adults. *The Lancet*, 391(10127), 643-653.
4. Molist-Brunet, N., et al. (2021). Deprescribing Anticholinergic Medications. *Drugs & Aging*, 38(6), 481–491.
5. National Institute on Aging (NIA). Reducing Medication Risks in Older Adults. Available at: [NIA.gov](https://www.nia.gov).
6. Peterson, G. M., et al. (2017). Collaborative Care for Polypharmacy Reduction. *Therapeutic Advances in Drug Safety*, 8(1), 11-18.