



FAQ: Acquiring Accreditation for Ambulatory Health Care Organizations

Q. What is the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care?

A. The Accreditation Association, also known as AAAHC, is a private, non-profit organization formed in 1979 specifically to develop national standards for ambulatory health care centers and to provide a peer-based accreditation processes that concentrates on patient safety, quality and value. AAAHC and the AAAHC Institute for Quality Improvement, also provide educational programs for ambulatory care centers and survey reports on best practices.

Q. What is accreditation?

A. Accreditation is a voluntary process through which an organization is able to measure the quality of its services and performance against nationally recognized standards. The accreditation process involves self-assessment by the organization, as well as a thorough review by the Accreditation Association's expert surveyors. The accreditation certificate is a symbol that an organization is committed to providing high-quality health care and that it has demonstrated that commitment by measuring up to the Accreditation Association's standards.

Q. What types of organizations would seek AAAHC accreditation?

A. AAAHC accreditation is specifically for organizations that provide diagnostic or medical care on an outpatient basis – where an overnight stay would not be required. These might include outpatient health care clinics or surgery centers, birthing centers, immediate/urgent care centers; diagnostic imaging or radiation oncology centers; outpatient surgical centers and office surgery practices; some large multi-specialty medical or dental group practices; podiatrist or chiropractic offices; specialty treatment centers for lithotripsy, endoscopy, pain management, occupational or women's health; managed care and health maintenance organizations; or college/university and Indian health centers.

Q. Is accreditation mandatory for ambulatory health care organizations?

A. Accreditation requirements are made on a state-by-state basis with a wide range of regulations. For example, beginning on July 14, 2009, all office-based surgery practices in New York State are required to obtain and maintain full accredited status with a nationally recognized accrediting agency.

Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia require or recognize accreditation of certain types of ambulatory surgical organizations including Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida,

Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia and Wyoming. In all of the states that have accreditation requirements, AAAHC is recognized as an accrediting organization.

For office-based surgery procedures requiring moderate to high levels of anesthesia, Connecticut, Kansas, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Tennessee require accreditation. California and Florida require state certification or accreditation. Louisiana, North Carolina and Texas exempt accredited settings from surgery/anesthesia standards. Alabama, Illinois, Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia have adopted anesthesia or surgery regulations. Arizona prohibits treatment under general anesthesia in unlicensed physician offices. Washington has guidelines that make accreditation voluntary, but recently enacted legislation directing its Medical Quality Assurance Commission to adopt rules governing the administration of sedation and anesthesia.

Seven states also recognize AAAHC accreditation for quality assurance reviews of HMOs (Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Nevada and Texas).

Q. If accreditation is voluntary, why should an organization seek accreditation?

A. Earning the AAAHC Certificate of Accreditation shows that the organization has a commitment to providing quality health care, which is meaningful to insurance companies and other third-party payers, government agencies and the public. In addition, the survey process presents best practices in ambulatory health care, which can be educational for centers.

Q. How does the AAAHC differ from other accreditation groups?

A. The AAAHC concentrates on providing quality accreditation programs specifically and exclusively for the ambulatory health care community. Its volunteer surveyors are actively involved in ambulatory health care; they understand the specific issues facing outpatient organizations and have in-depth knowledge of the field.

AAAHC's survey model for accreditation is peer-based surveyors are physicians, registered nurses and administrators allowing for a collaborative and consultative approach that is educational and adaptable to the specific needs of an organization.