# 2026 NCQA Standards
# Why Payers Should Act Now

The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) has rolled out significant updates to its credentialing and provider data management (PDM) standards, effective July 1, 2025. These changes mark a pivotal moment for health plans, managed care organizations (MCOs), and provider network managers. With updated timelines, consolidated credentialing programs, and stricter verification requirements, these new standards demand proactive planning to avoid compliance risks and ensure operational efficiency.

## New NCQA standards/requirements

1

### CONSOLIDATION OF CREDENTIALING PROGRAMS

NCQA has combined its credentialing accreditation and Certified Verification Organization (CVO) certification into a single, streamlined program. While this simplifies the overall accreditation process, it also requires organizations to ensure stronger alignment between their policies and procedures.

2

### REVISED VERIFICATION TIMELINES

NCQA has significantly shortened credentialing verification timeframes:

- Licensure verifications have been reduced from 180 days to 120 days.
- Work history verifications have been reduced from 365 days to 120 days.

Organizations must adjust their internal processes to meet these accelerated timelines and maintain compliance

3

### NEW INTERIM SURVEY OPTION

NCQA now allows organizations to undergo an interim survey to review policies and procedures, offering 18 months to address gaps before full accreditation. This provides a grace period but requires thorough preparation to avoid non-compliance.

© 2026 symplr | All rights reserved.

4

### PROVIDER DEMOGRAPHIC DATA UPDATES

Organizations must collect race, ethnicity, and language data on credentialing applications. These fields must be optional but available for providers to complete.

5

### STRICTER SANCTIONS MONITORING REQUIREMENTS

Organizations must gather exclusion information for Medicaid from all state sources and ensure compliance with Medicare's exclusion database requirements.

## The impact on payers

The NCQA updates underscore the increasing complexity of maintaining compliance in a rapidly evolving regulatory environment. For payer organizations, these changes pose several challenges:

- **Tightened timelines:** Reduced verification windows necessitate faster data collection, validation, and reporting. Manual processes simply cannot keep pace.
- **Increased data complexity:** Collecting and maintaining diverse provider data—including optional fields for race, ethnicity, and language—requires robust systems and standardized processes.
- **Operational burdens:** The interim survey option provides a safety net but demands meticulous preparation and ongoing oversight to address gaps.
- **Compliance risks:** Failure to meet these standards can result in accreditation delays, penalties, and damage to payer reputation.

To navigate these challenges effectively, payers must leverage advanced tools and technologies designed to streamline credentialing and PDM processes.

© 2026 symplr | All rights reserved.

## How credentialing and PDM software can help

The Credentialing and PDM software solutions give payers a strategic advantage in aligning their organizations with the 2026 NCQA standards. Here's how:

### 1 AUTOMATING CREDENTIALING WORKFLOWS

Software solutions automate primary source verification, licensure tracking, and work history validations. By streamlining these workflows, payers can meet reduced verification timelines without overburdening their teams.

**Functional benefit**: Automated alerts and workflows ensure no critical deadlines are missed.

**Emotional benefit:** Teams feel confident and less stressed, knowing compliance is managed proactively.

### 2 CENTRALIZING PROVIDER DATA

Modern PDM platforms consolidate provider data into a single source of truth. This eliminates silos, reduces discrepancies, and ensures data accuracy across all systems.

**Functional benefit**: Real-time updates improve data integrity and reduce errors.

**Emotional benefit:** Stakeholders trust the system to provide accurate and up-to-date information.

### 3 ENHANCING COMPLIANCE MANAGEMENT

With built-in compliance tools, software solutions can monitor sanctions, track licensure expirations, and generate audit-ready reports. These capabilities mitigate the risk of penalties and accreditation delays.

**Functional benefit**: Automated compliance checks simplify adherence to NCQA standards.

**Emotional benefit:** Leadership gains peace of mind knowing regulatory risks are minimized.

### 4 SUPPORTING INTERIM SURVEY PREPARATION

An NCQA-certified credentialing software simplifies the documentation and policy tracking required for interim surveys. This allows payers to identify gaps and address them proactively.

**Functional benefit**: omprehensive dashboards provide visibility into policy compliance.

**Emotional benefit:** Teams feel empowered to tackle gaps with clarity and precision.

© 2026 symplr | All rights reserved.

## The cost of waiting

Delaying preparation for the NCQA updates can lead to:

- **Increased operational costs:** Inefficient workflows and last-minute fixes drive up administrative expenses.
- **Reputational risks:** Compliance failures can erode trust with members and providers.
- **Missed opportunities:** Early adopters of credentialing and PDM technology gain a competitive edge through operational efficiency and enhanced member satisfaction.

## Getting ahead of the curve

To stay ahead, payers should:

- **Conduct a gap analysis:** Evaluate current credentialing processes and identify areas requiring improvement.
- **Invest in technology:** Adopt credentialing and PDM software to streamline workflows and ensure compliance.
- **Train teams:** Ensure staff understand the new standards and how to leverage technology effectively.
- **Engage partners:** Work with trusted vendors and CVOs to ensure alignment with NCQA standards.

The NCQA updates present both challenges and opportunities for payers. By acting now, organizations can not only ensure compliance but also optimize operations, reduce costs, and enhance provider and member satisfaction. Credentialing and PDM software solutions offer the tools needed to succeed in this evolving landscape.

Position your organization for success

© 2025 symplr | All rights reserved.