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# **Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Quality Rating System (MAC QRS) Design Guide Module 3: How States Can Use Human-Centered Design to Build Their MAC QRS Website**

**September 24, 2025**

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# Background

- CMS's Medicaid and CHIP Quality Rating System (MAC QRS) requires states to display quality ratings for Medicaid and CHIP managed care plans (MCPs). These ratings aim to help beneficiaries make informed plan selections by offering clear, accessible, and comparable information on MCP performance.
- CMS engaged states, MCPs, and other interested parties to support implementation. This collaborative process and its findings are summarized across three Design Guide Modules.

## Module 1

Key Findings from User Testing

## Module 2

Using Human-Centered Design to Inform Website Prototypes

## Module 3

How States Can Use Human-Centered Design to Build Their MAC QRS Website

# Purpose of Module 3



**Describe the role and benefits of user testing in Human-Centered Design.**



**Identify key points in the website development process where states can apply the Human-Centered Design framework.**



**Share considerations for implementing the Human-Centered Design framework when building a MAC QRS website.**

# Overview of Module 3

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- To support the design and development of their MAC QRS websites, states may apply a Human-Centered Design framework.
- This approach can help states better understand and incorporate user needs—ensuring that quality information is accessible, understandable, and relevant to Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries and their caregivers.
- Module 3 highlights the benefits of user testing, provides examples of when states may consider conducting user testing, and outlines key considerations for applying Human-Centered Design principles to MAC QRS website development.
  - Module 2 provides an overview of Human-Centered Design and how CMS applied the framework to develop the website prototypes. Reviewing Module 2 provides helpful context for understanding the concepts presented in Module 3 and is available at <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/quality-of-care/medicaid-managed-care-quality/quality-rating-system>.



# **The Benefits of User Testing in Human-Centered Design**

# User Testing in Human-Centered Design

- **Human-Centered Design focuses on designing around human needs and experiences.**
- **User testing is a critical step in the human-centered design process, involving the observation of real users as they interact with a product or prototype to gather feedback on its usability, functionality, and relevance.**
- **Research on usability testing has shown that identifying usability issues early in the design process reduces costly rework during development.<sup>1</sup>**
  - Studies have shown that usability testing can accelerate development timelines and improve adoption rates by ensuring the product meets user needs.<sup>1</sup>
  - A literature review conducted by the Nielsen Norman Group found that usability testing in website redesigns led to an average 135% improvement in key performance metrics.<sup>2</sup>

Sources: <sup>1</sup> <https://uxpa.org/the-roi-of-usability/>; <sup>2</sup> <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/return-on-investment-for-usability/>.

# Benefits of User Testing a Website



## Improved User Experience

User testing helps identify pain points in the navigation, layout, and content, enabling designers to create a more intuitive and enjoyable experience for visitors.



## Integrated User Feedback

Observing real users helps to uncover issues with site usability that might not be obvious to the development team. This leads to more user-friendly design changes.



## Improved Accessibility

User testing can highlight accessibility challenges for people with disabilities, ensuring that the website is usable for a wider audience and aligns with accessibility guidelines.



## Reduced Development Costs

Early detection of problems during the design and development phases can prevent costly fixes after launch. Addressing issues before they become too big saves time and money in the long run.



## Validated Assumptions

User testing helps validate hypotheses and design assumptions, ensuring that the features and layout choices align with actual user needs and preferences.

# Benefits of User Testing a Website, Continued



## Enhanced Customer Satisfaction

Testing ensures the website is easy to use and meets users' needs, leading to a better overall experience.



## Increased Retention

User testing helps ensure the website is intuitive and effective, which can improve user retention since users are more likely to return to a site that works well and meets their needs.



## Get Objective Data

User testing provides direct insights from real users, reducing the risk of making decisions based on subjective opinions or internal biases.



## Improved Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Testing ensures a website with smooth navigation and fast load times often translates to better SEO performance, as search engines prioritize sites with excellent user experience.



## Faster Iterations

Testing provides a feedback loop that helps designers and developers make quicker adjustments and iterate on the website design more effectively.



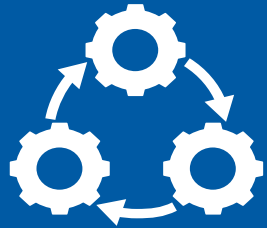
# Applying User Testing to MAC QRS Website Development

- **CMS applied user testing and feedback to create two MAC QRS website prototypes:**
  - Prototype A, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTYiGKAhoog>
  - Prototype B, available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4WJ\\_SlsVdo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4WJ_SlsVdo)
  - User feedback also helped shape the website display requirements.<sup>1</sup>
- **States that follow federal MAC QRS requirements and use CMS resources (e.g., the prototypes) will launch websites informed by real user feedback.**
- **CMS also encourages states to consider a human-centered design approach during their own website development process.**

Note: For more information on CMS's user testing approach, findings, and their impact on the prototypes and the 2024 Final Rule, see Design Guide Module 1, available at <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/quality-of-care/medicaid-managed-care-quality/quality-rating-system>.

<sup>1</sup>The 2024 Medicaid Program; Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Managed Care Access, Finance, and Quality Final Rule is available at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/05/10/2024-08085/medicaid-program-medicare-and-childrens-health-insurance-program-chip-managed-care-access-finance>.





## **Key Moments for States to Use the Human-Centered Design Framework in MAC QRS Website Development**

# Reflecting on the State's Medicaid and CHIP Program Structure

- CMS's user testing and MAC QRS prototypes were based on a hypothetical Medicaid and CHIP program. States will need to adapt these tools to reflect their specific program structures or requirements.
- States can apply the three Human-Centered Design phases to guide this process:



**Discover.** Engage in one-on-one interviews or small focus groups to learn how beneficiaries process program and MCP information.



**Design.** Develop wireframes and prototypes, tailoring the level of detail and interactivity to match their capabilities and resources.



**Test.** Test design products with their beneficiaries and caregivers to determine the navigability, usability, and accessibility of MCP information, as well as the ease of decision-making.

Note: For more information on the phases of Human-Centered Design, refer to Module 2, available at <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/quality-of-care/medicaid-managed-care-quality/quality-rating-system>.



# Using Human-Centered Design When Adding Quality Measures

- States may choose to add quality measures to their MAC QRS website beyond those in the mandatory set.
- It's important to ensure the selected measures reflect the state's Medicaid and CHIP program structure and beneficiary priorities.
- States can apply the three Human-Centered Design phases to guide this process:



**Discover.** Conduct interviews or small focus groups with beneficiaries to (1) identify quality domains that are important to them and (2) select relevant measures from a pre-determined list that reflect the services that are most important to them.



**Design.** Develop wireframes and prototypes to illustrate which measures have been newly added or customized.



**Test.** Test design products with individuals or small focus groups to assess (1) the usability and clarity of the measure display and (2) whether the measure information is easy to understand and feels relevant.

# Using Human-Centered Design When Adding Website Features

- States may choose to add features to their MAC QRS website beyond those required by MAC QRS regulations.
- Applying the Human-Centered Design framework can help ensure that new features are both useful and accessible to beneficiaries.
- States can apply the three Human-Centered Design phases to guide this process:



**Discover.** Conduct interviews or small focus groups with beneficiaries to (1) identify website features that are most helpful for decision-making and (2) prioritize features from a pre-determined list. If features are added after launch, gather feedback on the current site to identify improvements for usability and accessibility.



**Design.** Develop wireframes and prototypes to visualize new features and prepare for testing.



**Test.** Test features with beneficiaries and caregivers to assess the usability, accessibility, and relevance of these new features to real-world decision-making.



# **Considerations for Using Human-Centered Design for MAC QRS Website Development**

# Customizing Human-Centered Design Activities

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- **States can tailor their user testing and Human-Centered Design activities based on available capacity and resources.**
- **When determining which Human-Centered Design activities to launch, consider:**
  - Which design steps or products will be most helpful for implementing the MAC QRS?
  - What user feedback is most critical to inform development?
  - Which populations need to be included to ensure meaningful insights?

# Preparing to Apply Human-Centered Design in MAC QRS Development

- Before launching Human-Centered Design activities, states should consider how to engage beneficiaries and reach them effectively.
- Select engagement methods that align with the state's goals and capacity. Options include:
  - **One-on-one interviews:** Although they can be resource-intensive, they provide deeper, more personalized feedback and detailed personal insights.
  - **Focus groups:** More cost-effective than individual interviews and useful for gathering a range of perspectives.
- Select the outreach strategies that align with the state's intended audience and context. Options include:
  - Reaching out to beneficiaries directly using Medicaid and CHIP enrollment lists.
  - Posting announcements on the state Medicaid website or portal.
  - Partnering with community-based organizations.
  - Promoting participation through social media and online forums.
  - Collaborating with healthcare providers who serve Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries.
  - Hosting public events or outreach sessions where beneficiaries are informed about the opportunity to provide feedback.



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**Questions? Email the MAC QRS team**  
at [MAC\\_QualityRatingSystem@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:MAC_QualityRatingSystem@cms.hhs.gov)