

2026 Star Ratings cut points cheat sheet

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SHORT ANSWER

This is a free, printable cheat sheet on how CMS sets Medicare Star Ratings cut points: the per-measure thresholds that turn a score into 1 to 5 stars. It covers Tukey outlier deletion, the 5 percentage point guardrail, and the Reward Factor, and includes a worksheet to plan the glide path to 4 stars. Print it or save it as a PDF.

Cut points are the thresholds CMS sets each year to turn a measure's score into a 1 to 5 star rating. Because CMS sets them from the distribution of every contract's score, no plan knows the exact cut point in advance, so quality teams plan to a margin. This cheat sheet is free to print or save as a PDF, no email required.

How CMS sets cut points

The mechanics, in four steps

- **Collect the field.** CMS takes every contract's score for a measure.
- **Remove outliers (Tukey).** For non-CAHPS measures, CMS deletes scores outside 3.0 times the interquartile range below the first quartile or above the third quartile.
- **Cluster.** A clustering algorithm groups the remaining scores into five bands, which become the 1 to 5 star thresholds.
- **Apply the guardrail.** A cut point cannot move more than 5 percentage points from the prior year for most non-CAHPS measures.

The terms on one page

Term	What it means
Cut point	The score threshold that earns a given star level for a measure.
Tukey outlier deletion	Removes extreme outlier contract scores (3.0x IQR fences) before clustering, which stabilizes cut points year to year.
Guardrail	Caps year-over-year cut-point movement at 5 percentage points for most non-CAHPS measures.
Guardrail exceptions	The 5-point cap is not applied to the Part C and Part D improvement measures, or to any measure in the program 3 years or less, which includes measures returning after a substantive respecification.
Reward Factor	An adjustment of up to 0.4 added for consistently high performance with low variance. Applies for the 2026 Star Year and continues into 2027.
EHO4all	The Excellent Health Outcomes for All reward, previously the Health Equity Index, was set to replace the Reward Factor in Star Year 2027. CMS finalized on April 2, 2026 that it is not implementing it and is keeping the historical Reward Factor.

For the 2026 Star Year detail, see the [2026 Star Ratings cut points explainer](#); for what changes next year, see the [2027 Star Ratings changes](#).

Glide-path planning worksheet

List your priority measures, last year's 4-star cut point, your current rate, and the gap to close. Add the 5-point guardrail to last year's cut point to set a safe target, since the real cut point can move up that far.

Measure	Weight	Prior 4-star cut point	Your current rate	Gap to target

Prioritize the [triple-weighted](#) measures first, since a few points there move the summary rating more than almost any other lever.

How Pelica helps you hit the cut point

The hard part is not knowing the cut point. It is closing enough gaps, on the right members, before the measurement year ends. Most platforms show the gap list. Pelica's [Quality and Stars copilot](#) forecasts the glide path to each cut point, flags the members who can still move the measure, and closes the loop from outreach to a sourced, scorable result. Across deployments, customers close about 90% of BCS and KED gaps in-year and 70% or more of transitions-of-care gaps within 30 days.

Sources

- [CMS: 2026 Part C & D Star Ratings Technical Notes](#)
 - [CMS: 2026 Star Ratings Fact Sheet](#)
 - [42 CFR 423.186: Calculation of Star Ratings](#)
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Frequently asked questions

Common questions about Star Ratings cut points and this cheat sheet.

What are Star Ratings cut points?

Cut points are the score thresholds CMS sets each year that determine how many stars a measure earns, from 1 to 5. CMS sets them from the distribution of all contracts' scores for that measure, so a plan does not know the exact cut point until the ratings are released.

What is Tukey outlier deletion?

Tukey outlier deletion is the step CMS applies to non-CAHPS measures before setting cut points. It removes contract scores that fall outside 3.0 times the measure's interquartile range below the first quartile or above the third quartile, then clusters the remaining scores. Removing extreme outliers makes cut points more stable year to year.

What is the Star Ratings guardrail?

The guardrail caps how far a cut point can move from one year to the next at 5 percentage points for most non-CAHPS measures. It prevents large year-over-year swings, which is why plans plan to a margin above the prior year's cut point plus the guardrail.

Is this cheat sheet free?

Yes. The cheat sheet is free to print or save as a PDF, with no email required. It summarizes how CMS sets cut points and includes a worksheet to plan your glide path to 4 stars.