

BLUE DISTINCTION® CENTERS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT BLUE DISTINCTION® SPECIALTY CARE CENTERS

What are Blue Distinction Specialty Care Centers?

- Blue Distinction Specialty Care is a national designation program, awarded by local Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS) companies, recognizing healthcare providers that demonstrate expertise in delivering quality and affordable health care to meet consumers' specialty care needs—safely, effectively, and cost-efficiently.
- The goal of the program is to help patients find both quality and value for their specialty care needs, while providing a credible foundation on which employers may customize their employee benefits.

Can you tell me more about the Blue Distinction Centers for Spine Surgery?

- The 2025 Blue Distinction Centers for Spine Surgery program will evaluate acute care hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers that offer elective spine surgery services for adult patients (ages 18 and over) with degenerative disease.
- To learn more about the evaluation components for physicians and hospitals, [click here](#).

ABOUT THE AMERICAN SPINE REGISTRY'S COLLABORATION WITH THE BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD ASSOCIATION (BCBSA)

What is the goal of the American Spine Registry and BCBSA collaboration?

- The Registry is collaborating with BCBSA to allow quality outcomes data from the American Spine Registry (ASR), a collaborative effort between the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the AAOS, to be evaluated by BCBSA for current and prospective [Blue Distinction Centers](#).
- The Registry will provide a pathway for reporting patient-aggregated, deidentified site and surgeon level data from ASR participants, if opted in, to BCBSA on a recurring basis.

What are the program benefits?

- By creating pathways for organizations like BCBSA to seamlessly evaluate authorized, high-quality data, the ASR is advancing the utility and transparency of registry outcomes data.

Can you tell me how this helps my institution or my patients?

- The Blue Distinction Center designation is a mark of quality, indicating that a hospital has met rigorous standards for delivering safe, effective, and cost-efficient care for spine surgeries. This recognition can enhance the hospital's reputation among patients, healthcare professionals, and insurers.
- ASR will aggregate and stratify the required BCBSA quality measures on the behalf of participating sites, reducing the burden of submitting these measures for each race and ethnicity break down across the 5 measures for each specialty distinction program. This will reduce the tracking and data submission burden on sites, streamlining their initial designation or re-designation process.



How will BCBSA use the ASR performance measures?

- The metrics will be used by BCBSA as part of the process that designates qualifying sites as high-quality institutions for degenerative spine surgery.

What measures are being reported for participation?

- The ASR will provide BCBSA with aggregate, patient deidentified performance metric reporting at the site and surgeon level for participating sites that have executed the consent form, for ASR registry measures identified below:
 - ASR Registry Measures:
 - 90-day unplanned all cause inpatient readmission (hospitals) / admissions (ASCs)
 - 90-day major complication composite
 - 90-day postoperative mortality rate
 - Preoperative and postoperative functional/ health assessment status
 - ACSS-4 (Cervical) Pre-operative and Post-operative Patient Reported Outcomes (PROs)
 - ACSS-8 (Lumbar) Pre-operative and Post-operative Patient Reported Outcomes (PROs)

What if our institution is already a Blue Distinction Center?

- Any future re-designation evaluation will require ASR participation and measure submission via the registry.

Do I have to be a participating ASR site in order to submit data for consideration as a Blue Distinction Specialty Center?

- For the 2025 Designation Evaluation, sites can still submit quality measure data via ASR or the BCBSA Provider Survey. For all future Designation Evaluations, participation and measure submission with ASR will be required.

How do I know if I have the right data to submit via ASR for Blue Distinction Evaluation?

- Calculation of the Blue Distinction Measures requires submission of all 3 data/file types to ASR: Procedure, Postoperative (all cause, unplanned readmissions within 90 days post-index procedure), and PROMs.
- A detailed measure specification with inclusion and exclusion coding is [available here](#).
- There is a BCBS Blue Distinction Performance Report in RegistryInsights (being released on May 22) that will show the cases-level details for eligible measure cases. Corresponding performance measures dashboard visuals will be released in June.
- If you have questions on your file submissions or your data, please reach out to Engagement@AmericanSpineRegistry.org.

Is there a specific time period that ASR participating sites need to provide consent?

- The Registry will send performance measure reports to BCBSA on a quarterly basis.
- In order to be included in the reports, interested ASR participating sites must provide consent. [Click here](#) to view the data share consent agreement form.
- Completed consent forms can be sent to Engagement@AmericanSpineRegistry.org to add to your current registry participation contract. The space for surgeon signatures needs to be completed to send BCBS surgeon-level data if the institution's legal or administrative teams are not authorized to sign on their behalf.



When can participating sites begin submitting performance metrics to BCBSA?

- Starting in June 2024, consenting ASR sites can submit performance metrics via the BCBS survey tool or the ASR for 2025 Designation Evaluation. ASR participation will be the sole pathway for performance measure submission starting with all future review cycles.

About Blue Distinction® Centers

Blue Distinction Centers (BDC) met overall quality measures, developed with input from the medical community. A Local Blue Plan may require additional criteria for providers located in its own service area; for details, contact your Local Blue Plan. Blue Distinction Centers+ (BDC+) also met cost measures that address consumers' need for affordable healthcare. Each provider's cost of care is evaluated using data from its Local Blue Plan. Providers in CA, ID, NY, PA, and WA may lie in two Local Blue Plans' areas, resulting in two evaluations for cost of care; and their own Local Blue Plans decide whether one or both cost of care evaluation(s) must meet BDC+ national criteria. National criteria for BDC and BDC+ are displayed on www.bcbs.com. Individual outcomes may vary. For details on a provider's in-network status or your own policy's coverage, contact your Local Blue Plan and ask your provider before making an appointment. Neither Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association nor any Blue Plans are responsible for noncovered charges or other losses or damages resulting from Blue Distinction or other provider finder information or care received from Blue Distinction or other providers.

The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association is an association of independent, locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies.

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