



STEP 3.3: Plan and implement your survey administration process



What is the purpose of this step?

Establishing a specific work plan and realistic timeline is essential to the success of your PHDS project. Many expect instant results with a quality measurement initiative. However, it takes time to collect, analyze, and report the quality measurement data—and to have those data used in ways that lead to improvements in care. So make sure you set a reasonable timeline for the overall project. It is very important to allow enough time for the administration of the survey, analysis of the results, and reporting of development, testing and production.

This section provides detailed information about the technical requirements for implementing the PHDS. The timelines listed in the technical specifications below have been tested in the field to ensure the best response rates and highest-quality data. Compressing the timeline can compromise data quality and reliability.

In this step you will:

- Understand the key steps and timeline for administering the PHDS.
- Verify your work plan and delegation of tasks within your implementation team.
- Prepare to specify in a contract with an internal or external vendor/department how you would like the PHDS to be administered.



Guidelines and Issues to Consider

Important note: This manual is specific to the administration of the PHDS or ProPHDS by mail. Refer to Step 1: PHDS Tool and Resources for other manuals describing the implementation guidelines for administering the PHDS over the telephone or in a pediatric office.

Survey administration process

This section contains a framework for a survey administration process that has been used by CAHMI and achieved acceptable response rates.

However, it is important to review survey administration processes used in your own health system with your own patients, and to identify strategies that have yielded the highest response rates.

The timing of the administration is also critical. Please consider the following:

1. **Holidays:** It is not recommended that you administer the survey during November and December as many parents are busy with the holidays.
2. **Seasons:** Summer can be a difficult time for survey administration as families are often on vacation. Higher response rates are often observed in the early fall and in late winter. However, avoid survey administration during the first week of school or during school holiday weeks.
3. **Other surveys in your health system:** Check to see if there are other surveys that may be sent to parents and try not to coincide with other survey mailings, such as the Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS).

There are six stages to administering the PHDS by mail:

- ➡ Stage # 1: Pre-notification letter
- ➡ Stage # 2: Toll-free number for parents
- ➡ Stage # 3: First mailing of cover letter and survey

- Stage # 4: Reminder postcard
- Stage # 5: Second mailing of cover letter and survey
- Stage # 6 (Optional): Second reminder postcard and/or telephone call

Stage #1: Pre-notification letter

For each selected child with a viable address, a pre-notification letter should be mailed. This letter should be available in all languages in which the survey will be administered. Pre-notification letters should be customized at the respondent level (e.g., "To the parent/guardian of [Child Name]") and should include the logo of your health system and the signature of the appropriate agency's executive or the leader of the units of analysis for which you are focused (e.g., the chief of pediatrics).

The pre-notification letter should:

- Provide the name of the target child for whom the survey should be completed.
- Explain that they were randomly chosen to assist you in providing information that would be useful in improving the health care of children.
- Explain that the parent or guardian who takes the child to the doctor most often should complete the survey.
- Specify how long the survey will take (See Table 2.3).
- Provide the toll-free number parents can use to call the vendor to ask questions about the study, verify the study's legitimacy, or request no further contact pertaining to the study.

Appendix 8 provides an example of a pre-notification letter.

Similar to the protocols developed for External Quality Review, the pre-notification letter is a strategy to maximize response rates, ensure confidentiality, describe how the results will benefit the respondent, and provide instructions on how to complete the survey.

Tip from the Field

Make sure that the United States Postal Service's "**Address Correction Service**" is utilized for all mailings. This will assure that you get accurate and complete information about the number of pre-notification letters that were not received by parents due to a bad address.

Stage #2: Toll-free number for parents to call with questions or to schedule an interview

Throughout the field phase, a live toll-free number should be maintained from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. (local time) Monday through Saturday and 3:00 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. (local time) on Sunday for respondents. Calls outside these hours should be referred to voicemail.

Stage # 3: First mailing of cover letter and survey

The survey should be sent one week after the pre-notification letter is mailed. It should be accompanied by a cover letter that explains the project and includes the other details from the pre-notification letter. **Appendix 8** provides an example of a cover letter.

It is important the letterhead used includes a name/logo that parents recognize/value that parents recognize and value (e.g., the health system name).

Stage # 4: Reminder postcard

A reminder postcard should be sent to the entire starting sample. There are two options for the timing of the postcard reminder:

1. **One week** after the survey mailing. With this option, the postcard goes to the entire starting sample and thanks those who have already responded. This option saves the data analyst the time it would take to remove respondents from the data file used for the survey mailing. On the other hand, printing and mailing costs are higher because you are mailing to the entire starting sample.
2. **Two weeks** after the survey mailing. This allows parents more time to complete the survey, but may increase the chance that they have thrown it out. If you go with this option, remove the known respondents' names from the mailing, but still thank those who may have responded after you mailed the postcards. Also, provide parents with a toll-free number to use to request another survey.

Stage # 5: Second mailing of cover letter and survey

A second mailing of the cover letter and survey should be sent to the non-respondents at least one month after mailing the first survey.

Stage # 6 (Optional): Reminder Postcard and/or telephone call

If the response rate is low, then CAHMI recommends that you send another reminder to the parent.

You can use either a postcard OR you call the parent.

The telephone call should be used ONLY to remind the parent to send the completed survey back and find out if they need another one. CAHMI does not recommend that you administer the survey over the phone if you have conducted a majority of the survey administration by mail.¹ The telephone reminder is more costly than the postcard reminder; however, it can reach parents who might not have responded to the postcard.

Appendix 8 provides an example of the telephone script that can be used to remind parents to complete the survey.

Example 3.1: Survey Administration Timeline

Task	Date
Mail pre-notification letter	Day 1
Toll-free number for parents <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Live toll-free number maintained from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. (local time), Monday–Friday, and 11:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. on Saturday.• Calls outside these hours referred to voicemail.	Day 1
First mailing of cover letter and survey	Day 8
Reminder postcard Option 1: To the entire starting sample Option 2: To the non-respondents	Day 15 Day 22
Second mailing of cover letter and survey	Day 36
Reminder postcard or telephone call	Day 50

¹ As with all surveys, there is a mode effect on the survey results depending on whether it is completed by mail or telephone. Telephone-based surveys tend to systematically higher quality of care findings.

Data Confidentiality

The recommended protocol for implementing the PHDS ensures the confidentiality of the data. If you contract the administration of the survey to an external vendor, make sure to include data confidentiality provisions in the RFP and the contract.

Be sure that the organization conducting the survey administration signs a HIPAA Business Associate agreement. Check with your legal department about HIPAA compliance. The HIPAA privacy provisions establish how covered entities must safeguard the confidentiality of patients' protected health information. Your legal department can help you determine whether you are a covered entity under HIPAA and whether your project adequately safeguards the confidentiality of patients' protected health information as specified in the HIPAA regulations.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

You may be wondering if you need approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB), especially if you do not have an IRB within your organization. While many people think that IRB reviews are only for research projects, IRB approval should be obtained before conducting the PHDS or any survey. IRBs ensure that consumer/patient rights are protected. The technical specifications in this manual are meant to address legal issues and allow for IRB approval. These specifications are based on past pilots of the PHDS that have undergone IRB review and been approved.

If your organization does not have an IRB, you can still have a review. Independent IRBs often review projects on a contractual basis; nearly every educational institution has an IRB.