

DEFINING HIGH-RISK PATIENTS

In the medical home model, care teams are well aware of those patients they consider high-risk or “fragile”. Best practices dictate that each clinic defines their criteria for adding high-risk patients to their registry for tracking purposes. Below are some tips on how to build your definition of a high-risk patient.

- High costs of care
- High utilizers – hospitalizations, ED visits
- Additional factors used to calculate risk include: substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness/housing status, social isolation, medication adherence, and lack of a medical home/fragmented healthcare ([Medicaid Patients at High Risk for Frequent Hospital Admission: Real-Time Identification and Remediable Risks](#))
- Other considerations include: using oxygen, financial issues, lack of resources, certain high-risk factors (obesity, smoking, HIV, violence/safety issues, high alert medications (e.g., warfarin, digoxin, insulin), certain diagnoses (e.g., COPD, CHF, CKD, chronic pain, pneumonia, asthma, intellectual and developmental disabilities, cognitive impairment/dementia, CAD – depends on patient, control and/or severity), multiple diagnoses, and multiple medications.
- Have active medical problem(s) or are currently in the midst of evaluation of a potentially life-threatening disease that requires follow-up with a provider within **1 month or less**.
- Missed or delayed follow-up would result in significant morbidity **and** patient is unlikely to seek care unless there is practice outreach
- Have the care team consider if they would not be surprised if the patient would be admitted to the emergency department or hospital in the next six months; or would not be surprised if they became seriously ill or died in the next 12 months.
- In conjunction with set criteria for defining high risk, leave the ultimate decision to the clinician or care team because of the “soft call” social considerations, including a patient’s ability to self-advocate. (Leaving the decision solely up the clinician or care team without set criteria is not an entirely satisfactory approach, but sometimes this is where you have to start.)
- Some examples of definitions of patients with complex or special care needs
 - “Persons whose conditions require complex continuous care and frequently require services from different practitioners in multiple settings.” [American Geriatrics Society](#)
 - “Children with special health care needs are those who have or are at increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally.” [A New Definition of Children With Special Health Care Needs. Pediatrics.](#)