

The New Standard: Navigating Joint Commission Changes in 2026 – Accreditation 360

As a reminder, Joint Commission is moving forward with the previously announced updates to its national accreditation standards to better align with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). These adjustments to the accreditation manual for hospitals and critical access hospitals (CAHs) are part of the “Accreditation 360: The New Standard” survey approach, which will go into effect January 1, 2026. The initiative will reinforce an ongoing shift toward continuous survey readiness and will include new resources designed to support hospitals in maintaining long-term compliance.

What Accreditation 360 Means for Hospitals and Healthcare Systems

Accreditation 360 will bring a stricter, yet more focused, approach to compliance, with fewer individual standards and greater emphasis on demonstrating real, sustained performance in core safety and quality areas. Organizations will see a significant reduction and reorganization of standards (about a 50% decrease, including the removal of 714 requirements for hospitals and 649 for CAHs), along with clearer separation between CoP-based requirements and “above-regulation” expectations, now consolidated into National Performance Goals (NPGs).

To meet these expectations, hospitals will need stronger cross-department collaboration, real-time tracking, and updated policies and training to prevent gaps during the transition. The shift also increases expectations around transparency and benchmarking, with a greater focus on continuous readiness rather than periodic compliance checks.

Additionally, Survey Process Guides (SPGs) will replace Survey Activity Guides to support more consistent interpretation and alignment between surveyors and healthcare organizations.

Key changes

Standards reduction & reorganization

- A roughly 50% reduction in total standards, including the consolidation of Environment of Care and Life Safety into a single Physical Environment chapter.
- National Patient Safety Goals (NPSGs) will be consolidated into the new National Performance Goals (NPGs) chapter (with the Medical Staff chapter excluded).

Stronger alignment with CMS CoP

- Each CoP-related Element of Performance will now clearly reference its corresponding CMS requirement.

Updated survey approach

- SPGs will be the authoritative guide for surveyors and accredited organizations

Increased transparency

- Joint Commission standards will be publicly searchable online, with crosswalks, disposition reports, revised manuals, SPGs, and comparison tools released in advance for review.