



**CAHMI**

The Child and Adolescent Health  
Measurement Initiative

---

**THE  
CHILDREN  
WITH  
SPECIAL  
HEALTH  
CARE NEEDS  
(CSHCN)  
SCREENER<sup>®</sup>**

---

Developed in Collaboration with:



## BACKGROUND

The Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) Screener<sup>®</sup> was developed through the efforts of the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative (CAHMI), a national collaboration coordinated by FACCT—The Foundation for Accountability. Beginning in June 1998, the CAHMI brought together federal and state policymakers, health care providers, researchers and consumer organizations into a task force for the purpose of specifying a method to identify children with special health care needs. During the course of this project, the task force met in person six times and more than a dozen times by teleconference.

The CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> is a five item, parent survey-based tool that responds to the need for an efficient and flexible standardized method for identifying CSHCN. The screener is specifically designed to reflect the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau definition of children with special health care needs:

*“Children who have special health care needs are those who have...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.<sup>1</sup>”*

The CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> uses non-condition specific, consequences-based criteria to identify children with special health care needs for purposes of quality assessment or other population-based applications. Children are identified on the basis of experiencing one or more current functional limitations or service use needs that are the direct result of an on-going physical, emotional, behavioral, developmental or other health condition.

The non-condition specific approach used by the CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> identifies children across the range and diversity of childhood chronic conditions and special needs, allowing a more comprehensive assessment of health care system performance than is attainable by focusing on a single diagnosis or type of special need. In addition, the relatively low prevalence of most childhood chronic conditions and special health care needs often makes it problematic to find adequate numbers of children with a specific diagnosis or type of special need. A non-condition specific approach makes it possible in many cases to identify enough children to allow statistically robust quality comparisons across health care systems and/or providers.

The CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> is currently being used in several national surveys, including the National Survey of Children with Special Health Care Needs and as part of the CAHPS<sup>®2</sup> survey items in the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS). The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) has included the screener as an integral part of the new CAHPS 2.0 Child Survey. The Screener is also formally integrated into the CAHPS 2.0H Child Survey to identify the Children with Chronic Conditions Measurement Set, a component of the National Committee for Quality Assurance's Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS<sup>®</sup>).<sup>3</sup> English and Spanish versions of the CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> are available.

---

<sup>1</sup>McPherson M, Arango P, Fox H, et al. A new definition of children with special health care needs. *Pediatrics*. 1998; 102:137-140.

<sup>2</sup>CAHPS<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

<sup>3</sup>HEDIS<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).

**For more information on the development, testing & application of the CSHCN Screener:**

Bethell CD, Read D, Stein REK, Blumberg SJ, Wells N, Newacheck PW. Identifying children with special health care needs: development and evaluation of a short screening instrument. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*. 2002;2:38-47.

Bethell CD, Read D, Neff J, Blumberg SJ, Stein REK, Sharp V, Newacheck P. Comparison of the children with special health care needs screener to the questionnaire for identifying children with chronic conditions—revised. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*. 2002;2:49-57.

Van Dyck P, McPherson M, Strickland B, Nesseler K, Blumberg SJ, Cynamon M, Newacheck, PW. The national survey of children with special health care needs. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*. 2002;2:29-37.

**For scoring programs or other technical support for the CSHCN Screener and its applications:**

**Christina Bethell, Director**

CAHMI—The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative  
Telephone: 503.494.1930  
email: [cahmi@ohsu.edu](mailto:cahmi@ohsu.edu)

**For technical support for the CAHPS 2.0 Child Survey, please contact:**

The CAHPS Survey User Network  
800.492.9261 or [www.cahps-sun.org](http://www.cahps-sun.org)

**For technical support on the CAHPS 2.0H<sup>®</sup> Child Survey\*, please contact:**

NCQA Policy Clarification Support  
[hedis@ncqa.org](mailto:hedis@ncqa.org)

**User's Form:**

There is no cost to use the CSHCN Screener, however, we ask that you complete the enclosed User's Form. Your input helps us to develop an understanding of our key users and to provide updates.

Please submit the User's Form via *fax* (503.494.2475) or *email* ([cahmi@ohsu.edu](mailto:cahmi@ohsu.edu)).  
We look forward to hearing from you!

\*The National Committee for Quality Assurance has incorporated a version of the CAHPS 2.0 survey into the HEDIS measurement set. The version of the survey required for HEDIS is referred to as the "CAHPS 2.0H Survey."

## Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) Screener<sup>®</sup> (mail or telephone)

1. Does your child currently need or use **medicine prescribed by a doctor** (other than vitamins)?
  - Yes → Go to Question 1a
  - No → Go to Question 2
  - 1a. Is this because of ANY medical, behavioral or other health condition?
    - Yes → Go to Question 1b
    - No → Go to Question 2
  - 1b. Is this a condition that has lasted or is expected to last for at least 12 months?
    - Yes
    - No
  
2. Does your child need or use more **medical care, mental health or educational services** than is usual for most children of the same age?
  - Yes → Go to Question 2a
  - No → Go to Question 3
  - 2a. Is this because of ANY medical, behavioral or other health condition?
    - Yes → Go to Question 2b
    - No → Go to Question 3
  - 2b. Is this a condition that has lasted or is expected to last for at least 12 months?
    - Yes
    - No
  
3. Is your child **limited or prevented** in any way in his or her ability to do the things most children of the same age can do?
  - Yes → Go to Question 3a
  - No → Go to Question 4
  - 3a. Is this because of ANY medical, behavioral or other health condition?
    - Yes → Go to Question 3b
    - No → Go to Question 4
  - 3b. Is this a condition that has lasted or is expected to last for at least 12 months?
    - Yes
    - No
  
4. Does your child need or get **special therapy**, such as physical, occupational or speech therapy?
  - Yes → Go to Question 4a
  - No → Go to Question 5
  - 4a. Is this because of ANY medical, behavioral or other health condition?
    - Yes → Go to Question 4b
    - No → Go to Question 5
  - 4b. Is this a condition that has lasted or is expected to last for at least 12 months?
    - Yes
    - No
  
5. Does your child have any kind of emotional, developmental or behavioral problem for which he or she needs or gets **treatment or counseling**?
  - Yes → Go to Question 5a
  - No
  - 5a. Has this problem lasted or is it expected to last for at least 12 months?
    - Yes
    - No

# Scoring the Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) Screener<sup>®</sup>

The CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> uses consequences-based criteria to screen for children with chronic or special health care needs. To qualify as having chronic or special health care needs, the following criteria must be met:

- a) The child currently experiences a specific consequence.
- b) The consequence is due to a medical or other health condition.
- c) The duration or expected duration of the condition is 12 months or longer.

The first part of each screener question asks whether a child experiences one of five different health consequences:

- 1) Use or need of prescription medication.
- 2) Above average use or need of medical, mental health or educational services.
- 3) Functional limitations compared with others of same age.
- 4) Use or need of specialized therapies (OT, PT, speech, etc.).
- 5) Treatment or counseling for emotional or developmental problems.

The second and third parts\* of each screener question ask those responding “yes” to the first part of the question whether the consequence is due to any kind of health condition and if so, whether that condition has lasted or is expected to last for at least 12 months.

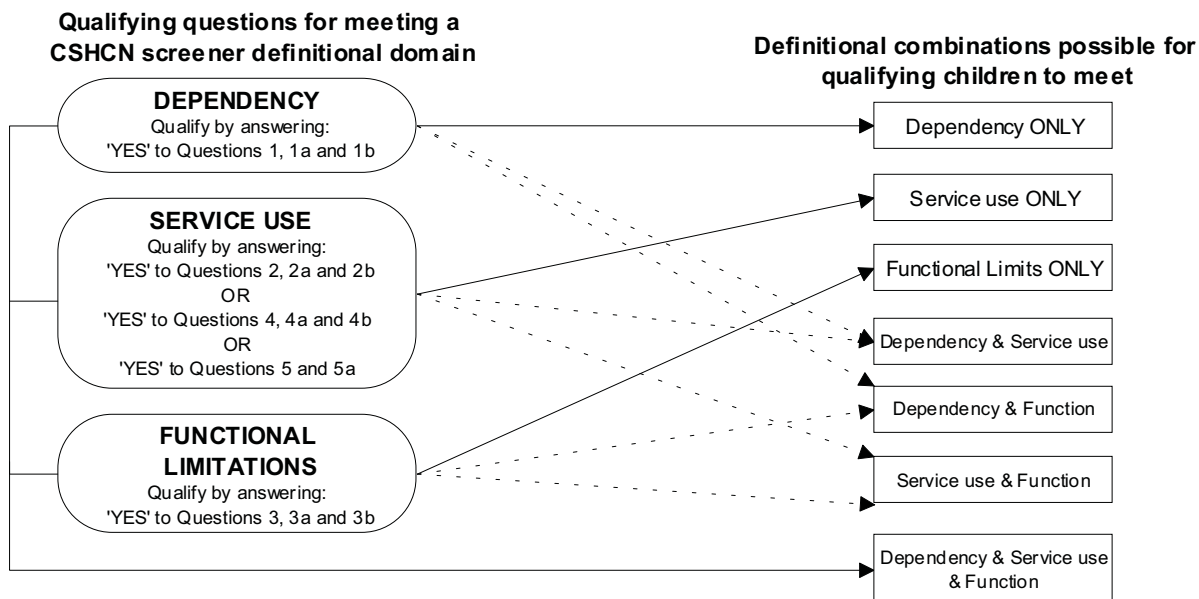
*\*NOTE: CSHCN screener question 5 is a two-part question. Both parts must be answered “yes” to qualify.*

All three parts of at least one screener question (or in the case of question 5, the two parts) must be answered “yes” in order for a child to meet CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> criteria for having a chronic condition or special health care need.

The CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> has three “definitional domains:”

- 1) Dependency on prescription medications.
- 2) Service use above that considered usual or routine.
- 3) Functional limitations.

The definitional domains are not mutually exclusive categories. A child identified by the CSHCN Screener<sup>®</sup> can qualify on one or more definitional domains (*see diagram*).



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people participated in the Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative (CAHMI) Living with Illness Task Force and contributed to the development and/or testing of the Children with Special Health Care Needs (CSHCN) Screener<sup>®</sup>:

Christina Bethell, CAHMI- The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative

Stephen Blumberg, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

Julie Brown, *RAND*

Treeby Brown, *Association of Maternal and Child Health Plans*

Paul Cleary, *Harvard Medical School*

Christine Crofton, *Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality*

Susan Epstein, *New England SERVE*

Jack Fowler, *University of Massachusetts*

Shirley Girouard, *Southern Connecticut State University*

Maxine Hayes, *Washington State Department of Health*

John Hochheimer, *formally with the National Committee for Quality Assurance*

Charles Homer, *National Initiative for Child Healthcare Quality, Institute for Healthcare Improvement*

Alice Lind, *Washington State Medical Assistance Administration*

Margaret McManus, *Maternal & Child Health Policy Research Center*

Merle McPherson, *Federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau*

John Neff, *Center for Children with Special Needs*

Paul Newacheck, *University of California, San Francisco*

James Perrin, *Massachusetts General Hospital*

Debra Read, CAHMI- The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative

Donald Steinwachs, *Johns Hopkins University*

Ruth Stein, *Albert Einstein College of Medicine*

Joe Thompson, *Arkansas Children's Hospital*

Deborah Klein Walker, *Massachusetts Department of Public Health*

Nora Wells, *Family Voices*