

New 50-state ranking shows where seniors on Medicare get best health care

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Seniors in states that invested in their health systems enjoy a higher quality of overall care, a new 50-state ranking shows.

Researchers compared [health care](#) in 24 categories for Medicare recipients in all 50 [states](#) and Washington D.C. related to cost, quality and access. The data, taken from publicly available databases, was weighed equally against each other before being averaged out, giving each state an overall score.

The analysis, conducted by insurance technology company MedicareGuide.com, ranked Minnesota first with North Dakota close behind. Massachusetts and California followed in the third and fourth spots. Nebraska ranked fifth, and Hawaii followed in sixth.

The results of the study aren't surprising to MedicareGuide co-founder and long-time [health care](#) advocate Jeff Smedsrud.

"What's interesting is that those states, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Minnesota, Hawaii, even North Dakota, that embraced improving access to health care 35, 40 years ago are among the national leaders now in providing the best care for those on Medicare," he said.

Health care has become a point of increasing anxiety for seniors. In research released by Gallup in 2019, one out of 10 seniors reported they avoided seeking treatment in the past year due to cost. The same report showed one in seven seniors couldn't pay for medicine prescribed to them in the last year.

North Dakota, ranked second overall, scored best in terms of prescription drug prices per capita, according to the data. Overall top-ranked Minnesota also was rated best for average monthly insurance premiums.

"Minnesota, along with several other mid-upper Midwestern states, have typically a more integrated health care system," said Dr. Mark Liebow, a consultant in [general internal medicine](#) at Mayo Clinic. "You typically see clinics and usually multi-specialty clinics as an organizational base."

Not all states received such high marks. Washington D.C. and Georgia were ranked overall 49 and 50, respectively. Dead last was Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's low ranking is disheartening but not surprising, said Dr. Lee Jennings, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center.

"Oklahoma has [poor access](#) to [primary care](#) particularly in rural parts of our state," she said. Primary care is helpful in preventing the development of health conditions later in life.

Oklahoma also received a low ranking on the AARP's 2020 Long-Term Services & Supports

State Scorecard, which provides comparable data regarding state level system performance for users of long-term services. Oklahoma ranked 46 on the scorecard, while Minnesota ranked first.

The information could be useful for those close to retirement and in retirement currently, says Smedsrud.

"It should be clear that there's a little bit more to retirement than sunshine and lower tax rates," he said. "Health care quality is equally important."

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