



Understanding the Benefits of Annual Wellness Visits

New Medicare options for AWWs have peaked interest, leading physicians and patients wanting to learn more.

AWV 101

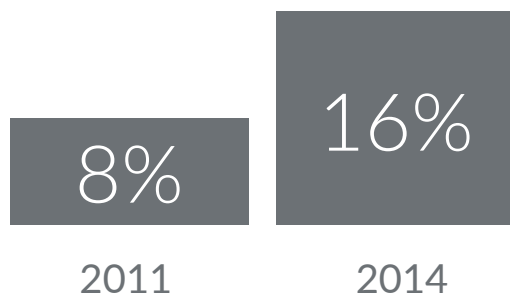
An Annual Wellness Visit can be defined as a detailed, question-based assessment of a patient's current health and risk factors.¹ Once a year, patients meet with a clinician to identify at-risk areas. These visits are different from regular annual doctor's appointments and are followed by counseling to help patients reduce their health risk factors.

This being said, Annual Wellness Visits, regardless of their appeal, have had a rather difficult start.

Annual Wellness Visits had a slow adoption rate on both physician and patient sides in the beginning.

In fact, data compiled from its start in 2011 shows that only 8% of eligible patients took part in an Annual Wellness Visit that year, with participation rising to a mere 16% in 2014.³

Eligible patients who took part in an Annual Wellness Visit per year



The difficult start of AWV can, in part, be attributed to²:

- ✓ Patients having a small co-pay (not the case anymore)
- ✓ Many not knowing whether or not they were eligible for the service
- ✓ Most patients not even knowing what an AWV is
- ✓ Patients being part of an accountable care organization or not
- ✓ Resources available to physicians and practices
- ✓ Many physicians not offering the service despite a well-balanced fee schedule
- ✓ Varied based on geography

Today, Medicare has assumed any co-pays for this service, making Annual Wellness Visits free for patients and reimbursable for physicians under codes **G0438 for the first visit** and **G0439 for all subsequent visits**.⁴

Regardless of this fact, participation rates are still quite minimal when considering the advantages of Annual Wellness Visits for both patients and physicians.



Annual Wellness Visit Services

The interest in Annual Wellness Visits is partly due to the elements covered within these visits. Going beyond treatment and delving into preventive measures, patients have a better understanding of their health and are better equipped in dealing with anything that may arise during these yearly meetings.

Some of the elements covered during an AWW include:⁵

A Personalized Plan of Preventive Services (PPPS) is then developed for the patient, providing them with all the necessary tools and resources required for dealing with any risks or current health problems.

Medicare is actively encouraging both patients and providers to take advantage of this service by not only making them **completely free for patients**, but by also providing **financial incentives** in some cases.⁶

- ✓ Review of medical and family history
- ✓ Develop or update a list of current providers and prescriptions
- ✓ Health risk assessment
- ✓ Height, weight, blood pressure and BMI calculation
- ✓ Cognitive Health Assessment
- ✓ Personalized health advice
- ✓ A list of risk factors and treatment options for the patient
- ✓ A screening schedule for appropriate preventive services



Patient Advantages

With Annual Wellness Visits focusing on prevention rather than intervention, patients are given the opportunity to take an in-depth look at how well their current treatment plan is progressing and address any issues that may have come up. This provides an unparalleled opportunity for patients to raise any concerns, if needed, about where they need more care.

Detailed assessments allow patients and clinicians to determine if there are any current **health and risk factors** that are not being adequately addressed, and will follow up with counseling to help reduce any risks if necessary.

These services are gaining momentum in regards to patient interest and their appeal is not lost on practices and physicians themselves.

Some of the highlights of Annual Wellness Visits for patients:



They are completely free



Include a Personalized Plan of Preventive Services (PPPS) and when to receive them



Center around coaching them in reducing potential health risks



Promote prevention rather than intervention



Do not include a physical exam



Physician Advantages

Physicians are beginning to look more and more into AWWs on request from either patients, on their own accord, or simply as a means to stay competitive and provide their patients with the best care.

“ The annual wellness visit is, I believe, the best opportunity to truly perform a preventive evaluation for our senior population - a comprehensive assessment of their overall health. ”

— Arnold Cuenca, D.O., member of the Family Practice Management (FPM) advisory board. ⁷

First visit code:

AWV G0438

Avg. reimbursement:

\$172 per patient.

Subsequent visits

code: AWV G0439

Avg. reimbursement:

\$111 per patient

every year.

Despite the added revenue and other advantages, these services do require quite some time and effort to be conducted, attributing to a small factor of why these are not as widespread today as they could be.

Annual Wellness Visits are actually interesting to physicians as they quite simply:



Provide an extra service to their patients



Generate additional revenue



Allow for closer ties to patients and their health



Meet many MIPS requirements along the way



Assess the current treatment plan without focusing on trying to diagnose new issues

Factors to Consider

There are a few things to consider, among others, when looking into providing Annual Wellness Visits.

These factors have led to **many physicians weighing the pros and cons of providing Annual Wellness Visits.**

As doctor Ishani Ganguli, instructor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a primary care physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital, said about Annual Wellness Visits:



Resources such as time,
additional staff, training, etc.



Costs
involved



The
paperwork



Medicare
reimbursement codes

“ I must say that I am conflicted on the subject. I've found that the visit can provide a useful space and time to talk with patients about difficult yet important topics that are otherwise crowded out by more urgent issues, such as planning for end of life, and to ensure they are up to date on their colonoscopies, shingles vaccines, and the like.

More broadly, these visits represent a well-meaning and needed effort to shunt resources toward primary care; to make an investment, as countries like the United Kingdom have done, in the foundation of health care.

But the reality of the visit can fall short of its intentions [...] Is the annual wellness visit the best use of my limited time with my patients? ”³

Dr. Ishani Ganguli,
instructor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and primary care physician.

The question of whether or not to provide these services no longer stems from how beneficial these visits are or aren't, but rather, **if the physician in question has the allotted resources to perform them without impeding on his or her current workflow.**

Hence, the attraction towards outsourcing Annual Wellness Visits has become more and more popular.

Physicians are seeing the benefits of providing these services through someone else without needing additional resources or hindering their relationship with their patients.

Outsourcing Annual Wellness Visits

To truly reap the benefits of Annual Wellness Visits as a physician, **the trend leans towards outsourcing the service.**

These services, although highly attractive to patients, can sometimes seem like a burden to many physicians. The time and resources required to perform such services can seem unsettling. However, when realizing **some companies tailor AWW services according to practice preferences** and increase their revenue in the process, most ask: Where do I sign up?

There are different ways of outsourcing Annual Wellness Visits:

- **Technological solutions** provide care services from the web only.
- **Plug-ins** are available in some EHRs where the provider uses his or her own staff to automate the way of asking and documenting the questions through the software platform's branching technology.
- **Full service solutions** complete the entire Annual Wellness Visits for you, providing both the software and the staff.

In full service solutions, outsourcing Annual Wellness Visits allow physicians to:

- ✓ Keep their current workflow
- ✓ Expand their care offerings
- ✓ Increase their revenue
- ✓ Provide an appealing service to their patients



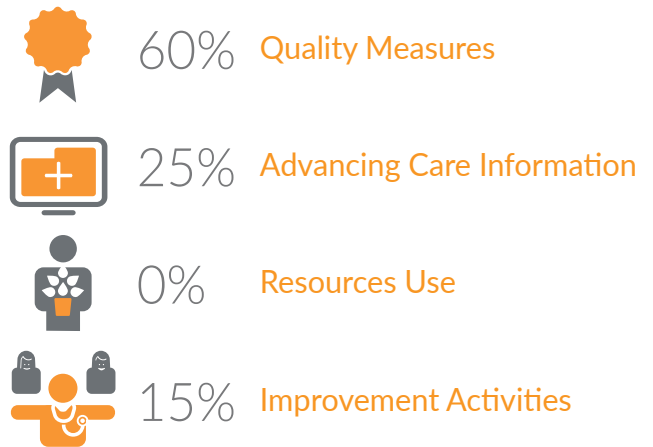
Outsourcing AWW to full service solutions is a great way for physicians to continue working the way they always have, while providing a hands-off service that allows them to have deeper insight into their patient's health and the control to sign-off on any important matters.

Meeting MACRA and MIPS Requirements

With 2017 being a transition year, Resource Use will not be calculated in the Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS), weighing Quality Measures at 60% of the composite score. This can be intimidating to meet as many are not fully aware of the MIPS categories and measures.

Luckily, Annual Wellness Visits meet many categories and subcategories not only within the Quality Measures, but within Clinical Practice Improvement Activities as well:

2017 TRANSITION YEAR WEIGHTS



QUALITY MEASURES

- ✓ Preventive care, high blood pressure screenings and tobacco cessation intervention
- ✓ Diabetes exams, cancer screenings, and CAD antiplatelet therapy
- ✓ Care plans, outcome assessments and follow-ups
- ✓ Medication documentation in medical records and even risk assessments

CLINICAL PRACTICE IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Beneficiary Engagement: Evidenced-based techniques to promote self-management into usual care and improved practices that disseminate appropriate self-management materials
- ✓ Population Management: Implementation of medication management practice improvements



Meeting MACRA and MIPS Requirements Through Health Services

See which MIPS categories and measures you can easily meet through services such as **CCM** and **AWV**

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Annual Wellness Visits meet 18 measures in four out of the six Quality Measures domains as well as three measures across two subcategories for CPIAs.

As AWW services generate additional revenue, by outsourcing this service, physicians and practices can effortlessly meet MIPS requirements and increase their bottom line in the process.

Download the eBook

Key Takeaways

Offering Annual Wellness Visits allow physicians and practices to gain competitive advantage, increase their care offerings, meet MIPS requirements and make more revenue in the process thanks to codes G0438 and G0439. These visits include:

1.

A detailed, **question-based assessment of a patient's current health and risk factors** that occurs yearly, with a personalized prevention plan given out at the end.

2.

A way to inform patients of **how to take control of their health** and provide the resources to help them and engage with them in new ways.

3.

The need for **resources** such as time, new staff or training. They also imply **additional costs and paperwork** if done in-house.

Outsourcing Annual Wellness Visits allow physicians and practices to **obtain the maximum benefits, without interrupting current workflows**. Personalized, outsourced services allow you to be as hands on or off as you like and effortlessly meet valuable MIPS requirements.

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| 1. The ABCs of AWWs:
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| | 8. Getting patients and physicians on board:
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The all-inclusive solution for tracking and billing for Chronic Care Management and Annual Wellness Visits, as well as offering in-demand Telemedicine and Remote Patient Monitoring services.
— Increased care offering. Quality performance. More revenue.

info@wellbox.care
866.730.6893
www.wellbox.care