



# Unhealthy alcohol use screening and follow-up



Unhealthy alcohol use is a major preventable cause of illness, injury, and death in the U.S. To improve outcomes and meet quality standards, we ask for your continued commitment to **annual standardized alcohol screening** and **timely follow-up** for patients who screen positive.

The U.S. Preventative Service Task Force (USPSTF) recommends screening all adults 18+ for unhealthy alcohol use and providing brief behavioral counseling, after positive screens. Early identification and brief intervention are proven to reduce harmful drinking and improve patient health.

## What does HEDIS say?

HEDIS measures the percentage of adults (18+) who were screened for unhealthy alcohol use with a standardized tool during the measurement year.



Measurement period  
January 1-December 31



One screening  
per year is required



Documentation to include  
the tool used and the result

- For follow-up: brief counseling or other follow-up care within 60 days of the first positive screen (61-day window total).
- Examples of follow-up: Alcohol counseling, referral for treatment, brief intervention, behavioral health visit addressing alcohol use, and medication-assisted treatment evaluation (if appropriate).
- Exclusions include: Alcohol Use Disorder diagnosis that started in prior year (specific to ICD-10 list), dementia diagnoses, and hospice enrollment.



## Screening and follow-up care codes

### CPT codes

99408, 99409

### HCPCS codes

G0396, G0397, G0443, G2011, H0005, H0007, H0015, H0016, H0022, H0050, H2035, H2036, T1006, T1012

### Screening instrument

### Total score LOINC codes

### Positive finding

**Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT) screening instrument**

75624-7

Total score  $\geq 8$

**Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test Consumption (AUDIT-C) screening instrument**

75626-2

Total score  $\geq 4$  for men;  
Total score  $\geq 3$  for women

**Single-question screening (for men): “How many times in the past year have you had 5 or more drinks in a day”**

88037-7

Response  $\geq 1$

**Single-question screening (for women and all adults older than 65 years): “How many times in the past year have you had 4 or more drinks in a day?”**

75889-6

Response  $\geq 1$



## How can you strengthen screening in primary care?

- Make screening routine at annual wellness visits, chronic care follow-ups, or new patient appointments.
- Use standardized tools and document both the screening tool and result in the medical record.
- Act immediately on positive screens by providing brief counseling or referring to behavioral health or substance use treatment when appropriate.
- Code eligible follow-up services (e.g., CPT 99408, 99409), ensuring both quality measures compliance and proper reimbursement.