

# ACUPUNCTURE

Does Acupuncture Provided Within a Managed Care Setting  
Meet Patient Expectations and Quality Outcomes?

A 2-Year Retrospective Study of 89,000 Managed Network Patients

*SOURCE: American Specialty Health Incorporated Health Services Department*



“When 99% of your members receiving services from an ASH-contracted provider rate the overall quality of care and service as good to excellent, then we know ASH and our providers are doing something right. We’re very pleased to offer health services that exceed national benchmarks for patient satisfaction.”

*Douglas Metz, DC, Chief Health Services Officer,  
American Specialty Health Incorporated*

### Success in Treating Conditions

**93%**

of respondents nationally said their provider was successful in treating their primary condition in 2014 & 2015.

### Quality of Care and Service

**99%**

of members surveyed nationally rated quality of care and service from their ASH network acupuncturist as good to excellent in 2014 & 2015.

### Recommend Health Plan

**90.5%**

of 2015 respondents and 89% of 2014 respondents said they would probably or definitely recommend their health plan to others.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Acupuncture is gaining in popularity as a mainstream health care service that offers adjunctive treatment as well as primary intervention. Through its subsidiaries, American Specialty Health Incorporated (ASH) has been managing acupuncture services for more than 18 years by building national and regional practitioner networks and providing claims services, credentialing, clinical quality management, and medical necessity review processes. ASH currently contracts with approximately 6,000 acupuncturists across the country who provide evidence-supported acupuncture services.

The ASH credentialing process ensures providers have the appropriate professional credentials, possess the required malpractice insurance, adhere to clinical guidelines, and maintain practice environments that meet professional health and safety standards. Contracted acupuncturists agree to adhere to ASH clinical guidelines and clinical quality evaluation processes.

Since 2012, the ASH acupuncturist network has cared for more than 157,000 patients.

Musculoskeletal pain syndromes represent the major category of health conditions covered by ASH acupuncture programs. Spinal pain in the lower back and neck is the most prevalent condition treated under ASH programs.

## OUTCOMES MONITORING

To evaluate the quality of care and outcomes of acupuncture services, ASH implements annual measurement processes. These processes measure and report outcomes data for program evaluation and quality improvement. ASH's outcomes monitoring and survey research are designed to achieve the following objectives:

- Assess and track patient satisfaction based on the type of specialist seen
- Measure overall and specific areas of patient satisfaction with their practitioner
- Examine patient satisfaction with the access and availability of specialty care
- Measure patient satisfaction with their specialty benefits design
- Determine the effectiveness of treatment from the specialty practitioner

By examining patient satisfaction, ASH can proactively address quality improvement opportunities and thereby improve overall satisfaction with acupuncture care services provided by our networked practitioners.

A key measurement tool used by ASH is the Clinician & Group Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CG-CAHPS®) survey. This survey, created by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), is being adopted widely as the standard for measuring patient perceptions of quality by health providers.

## THE STUDY

In a recent study, ASH set out to determine whether acupuncture services provided within a managed care setting could meet or exceed national CG-CAHPS benchmarks for patient satisfaction. In this study, results from the CG-CAHPS survey, along with results from additional ASH proprietary questions, were used to measure the satisfaction rates of acupuncture patients in a managed acupuncture program administered by ASH. Satisfaction with overall provider, access, communication, and office staff were measured.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Willingness to Recommend Health Plan

**90.5%**

of 2015 respondents and 89% of 2014 respondents nationally said they would probably or definitely recommend their health plan to others.

A key measure of satisfaction is whether a patient is willing to recommend their practitioner or insurance plan to family or friends.

In 2014, 89 percent of national acupuncture respondents and 90 percent of California acupuncture respondents said they probably or definitely would recommend their health plan to others. In 2015, responses were 90.5 percent and 93 percent, respectively, for national and California acupuncture respondents.

### Willingness to Recommend Provider

The 2014 survey showed 96.5 percent of national acupuncture respondents and 93.2 percent of California acupuncture respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend their ASH network acupuncture practitioner to family and friends. The 2015 results were 96.7 percent for national and 96.2 percent in California.

### Quality of Care and Service

**99%**

of members surveyed nationally rated quality of care and service from their ASH network acupuncturist as good to excellent in 2014 & 2015.

When asked to rate the overall quality of the care and services they received from their ASH network acupuncturist, 99 percent of national and 95 percent of California acupuncture respondents reported good, very good, or excellent service quality in 2014. The 2015 survey showed similar responses at 99 percent of national and 97 percent of California respondents.

## Overall Treatment Success

**93%**

of respondents nationally said their provider was successful in treating their primary condition in 2014 & 2015.

Patients were asked if their acupuncture provider was successful in treating their primary condition. Overall, 93 percent of national and 88 percent of California respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their ASH network provider was successful in treating their condition in both 2014 and 2015.

## Treatment Success: Medical Pain Clinic Referral Program

ASH operates a program where patients who are being treated in a medical pain clinic are offered the option to seek acupuncture treatment for their pain. Results from this referral program are included in the California data. In 2014, 84.8 percent of the patients in this chronic pain, physician referral-only, ASH-managed acupuncture program reported that the acupuncture provider was successful in treating their primary condition. In 2015, the success rate increased slightly to 85.2 percent. While this is lower than the organization's average of 94 percent for direct access patients, it is still a significantly positive result in a population of patients with severe chronic pain conditions.

## Overall Referral Rates

In 2014, national respondents reported they were referred to acupuncture services from another health care practitioner in 24.1 percent of cases; California responders reported 63.3 percent were referred (including the physician referral program noted above). Results in 2015 were similar at 24.4 percent of national and 59.2 percent of California respondents.

## Safety

In the 2014 survey, 98 percent of national and 97 percent of California acupuncture respondents agreed or strongly agreed that

the provider and staff ensured their safety. In 2015, both national and California respondents rated this category at 98.3 – 98.4 percent. Some patients will be fearful for their safety in any medical environment. Therefore, a result of 100 percent agreement with this survey question likely cannot be achieved.

## METHODS

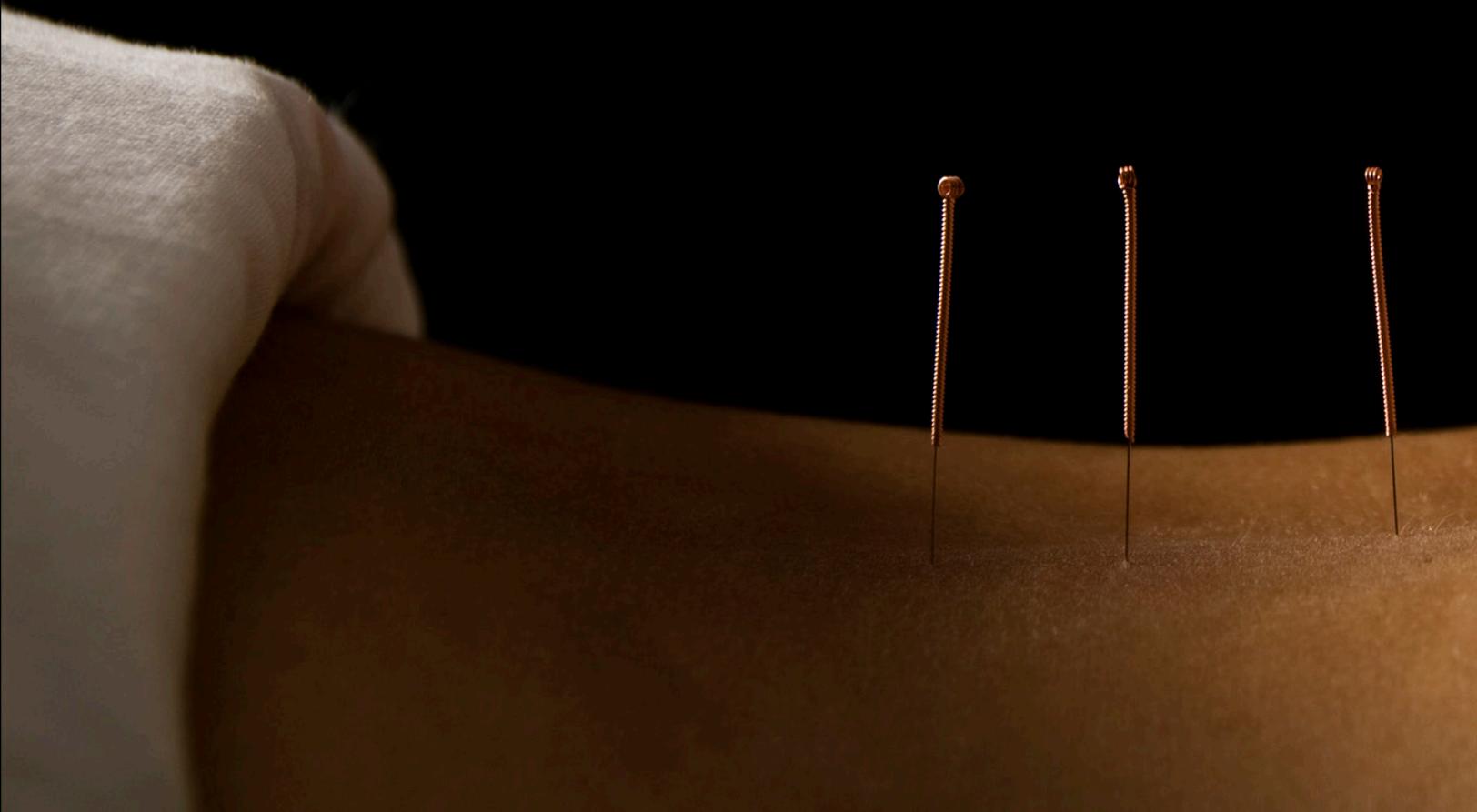
Data was extracted from the Adult 12-Month CG-CAHPS 2.0 survey and several additional ASH proprietary measures. The survey was performed by an independent third party research firm specializing in health care and certified in CAHPS surveys. The population surveyed included those 18 years of age or older who were seen by an ASH-contracted specialist within the first 6 months of both 2014 and 2015. ASH provided the research firm with a list of eligible patients. The survey was conducted using a mail methodology in accordance with AHRQ CG-CAHPS protocols. Initial surveys were mailed in September and October of both 2014 and 2015, and follow-up surveys were mailed to non-responders approximately one month after the initial survey. Responses were accepted through late October.

## PATIENT POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The average age of the ASH network acupuncture patient respondents for 2014 was 59 – 60.9 years; approximately 75 percent were female; about 85 percent had completed some college education, and the majority were white/Caucasian (78 percent of national and 68 percent of California). Fifty-four percent of national and nearly 39 percent of California acupuncture survey responders rated their health as excellent or very good. Similarly, 2015 respondent demographics showed an average age of 60.2 – 60.4 years. Seventy-seven percent of national acupuncture respondents and 70.9 percent of California respondents in the 2015 survey were female. The percentages of survey year 2015 respondents who rated their overall health as excellent or very good were 57.9 nationally and 43.6 in California.

“The results of this important survey of acupuncture patient satisfaction are incredibly validating. To learn that 93% of patients agreed that their provider successfully treated their condition is exceptional. This makes a very strong case for the continued growth of acupuncture as an option for patients in pain.”

*Matthew Bauer, L.Ac.  
Private practice, La Verne, California,  
Board Member, American Specialty Health Group, Inc.*





## RESULTS

Survey response rates for the national acupuncture and California acupuncture sample patient populations are represented in the table below. The 2014 and 2015 response rates were very similar to those of 2013, but had increased approximately one-third over 2011 and 2012 levels.

Specialty	2012		2013		2014		2015	
	Received	Response Rate						
Acupuncture (National)	205	26%	664	37%	641	36%	619	34%
Acupuncture (California)	202	24%	710	35%	617	34%	567	31%

### CG-CAHPS: Overall Patient Rating for ASH Network Providers

Eighty-seven percent of national acupuncture patient respondents and 80 percent of California patient respondents rated their ASH network provider highly (9 or 10 on a 0 to 10 scale) in 2014. The 2015 survey showed the same category rated at 87 percent national and 82 percent California. For both years, ASH's national acupuncture satisfaction rates were higher than the CG-CAHPS benchmarks (76 percent in 2014 and 80 percent in 2015).

Specialty	2014		2015	
	ASH	CG-CAHPS Benchmark	ASH	CG-CAHPS Benchmark
Acupuncture (National)	87%	76%	87%	80%
Acupuncture (California)	80%	76%	82%	80%

*Results represent top 2-box CG-CAHPS results for benchmark and ASH results.*

### CG-CAHPS: Access to ASH Network Providers

The access composite measure included information such as the ability to schedule appointments for routine or urgent care, success with obtaining answers to health questions during and after business hours, and whether or not the patient was seen by their health care provider within 15 minutes of the appointment time.

Specialty	2014		2015	
	Provider Access Composite Results "Usually," "Always"	CG-CAHPS Benchmark	Provider Access Composite Results "Usually," "Always"	CG-CAHPS Benchmark
Acupuncture (National)	97%	84%	97%	86%
Acupuncture (California)	93%	84%	96%	86%

*Results represent top 2-box CG-CAHPS results for benchmark and ASH results.*

### CG-CAHPS: Communication from ASH Network Providers

The next survey composite measure addressed communication. Questions included whether the practitioner explained things well, listened carefully, gave easy-to-understand information, showed respect, knew important information about the patient’s history, and spent enough time with the patient.

Specialty	2014		2015	
	Provider Communication Composite Results “Usually,” “Always”	CG-CAHPS Benchmark	Provider Communication Composite Results “Usually,” “Always”	CG-CAHPS Benchmark
Acupuncture (National)	99%	95%	99%	96%
Acupuncture (California)	95%	95%	95%	96%

*Results represent top 2-box CG-CAHPS results for benchmark and ASH results.*

### CG-CAHPS: Office Staff

Office staff was rated by the survey respondents in the areas of courtesy and helpfulness.

Specialty	2014		2015	
	Office Staff Composite Results “Usually,” “Always”	CG-CAHPS Benchmark	Office Staff Composite Results “Usually,” “Always”	CG-CAHPS Benchmark
Acupuncture (National)	97%	93%	99%	96%
Acupuncture (California)	96%	93%	97%	96%

*Results represent top 2-box CG-CAHPS results for benchmark and ASH results.*

### ADVERSE EVENTS

During this reporting period from 2014 – 2015, ASH received and investigated 13 reports of adverse events involving patients seen for acupuncture:

- 2 minor burns
- 1 breathing issue when exposed to the herb moxa and incense
- 1 report of nausea and vomiting unrelated to acupuncture needle insertion
- 4 experiences of transient pain after acupuncture; 1 also with bruising
- 2 retained needles after treatment
- 1 reported skin infection

This represents a safety profile of 13 events per 89,769 patients in 2014 and 2015 combined, or 0.014 percent of members reported an adverse event.

## CONCLUSION

These results demonstrate that patient satisfaction with acupuncture services can be maintained at or above national CG-CAHPS benchmarks in a managed care environment. Patients report high levels of satisfaction with overall care, safety, and the practitioner's ability to effectively treat their presenting health conditions. Patients also report high levels of willingness to recommend others to ASH for benefits and to their individual practitioners—key indicators of satisfaction.

ASH's management processes of credentialing and clinical quality evaluation for medical necessity of acupuncture services help maintain safety and quality of acupuncture services. The high quality of clinical care provided by ASH network practitioners supports ASH's goals to safely and effectively address the patient's health concerns and produce the high levels of satisfaction reflected in these survey results.

 American Specialty Health.

