

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DATE:** March 13, 2014  
**CONTACT:** Carol Ann Campbell  
**PHONE:** 973-315-0300 or 973-567-1901  
**E-MAIL:** carolann@campbellhealthmedia.com

**Data Profile of Atlantic City and Ventnor City Details  
Rates of Depression, Related Health Conditions in Sandy-hit Area**

**Federal Project to Improve Behavioral Health Services for Medicare Recipients Will Help  
Prepare for Future Disasters**

**EAST BRUNSWICK, NJ** — Some older adults and disabled residents in the Atlantic City and Ventnor City community may be at increased risk of deteriorating health, depression, anxiety/adjustment disorders, and isolation as a result of Superstorm Sandy. A new behavioral health profile, developed by Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. (HQSI), the federally designated healthcare quality improvement organization for New Jersey, provides data that can help determine the storm's impact of depression risk factors.

The Atlantic City and Ventnor City profile is one of 10 community and 10 county profiles developed as part of an ambitious Medicare-funded project, *Enhancing Coordination of Behavioral Health Services after Superstorm Sandy: Planning for Future Disasters*. The profiles focus on areas hardest hit by the storm.

The project aims to help local communities understand how the storm affected the behavioral health of older adults and the disabled, as well as plan for future disasters. Another goal is to encourage greater use of depression screening, a covered service for Medicare beneficiaries that can help identify those with deteriorating health related to depression.

HQSI used Medicare claims and other data to analyze rates of depression and related disorders, and the use of behavioral health services, among Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries living in selected communities during the 21-month period prior to October 2012. For example, the data shows that in Atlantic City and Ventnor City during this period:

- 24.3 percent of Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries experienced depression or related

disorders.

- The community had higher rates of substance or alcohol abuse or tobacco use (15.1%), alcohol or substance abuse (9.5%), and substance abuse (5.6%) than Atlantic County.
- Just 2.85 per 1,000 Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries received depression screening in 2012; the Medicare depression screening benefit became available in October 2011.

“Collecting this baseline data is the first step toward understanding how Superstorm Sandy affected the behavioral health of Medicare recipients,” said HQSI Quality Improvement Specialist Janet Knoth, BS, RN, CHPN. HQSI plans to update the profile with post-Superstorm Sandy data in early spring to determine the impact of the storm on behavioral health issues and services.

HQSI is reaching out to community leaders and mayors in Atlantic City and Ventnor City to discuss how this data can help increase the rate of depression screening and support a community-based approach to behavioral health services after a disaster.

“Older adults are especially vulnerable to physical and behavioral health issues after a disaster and, unlike other conditions, behavioral health issues are often under-diagnosed,” said Ms. Knoth. “Unfortunately, in our society, the stigma associated with behavioral or mental health may prevent people from seeking care. Since depression can also affect physical health, screening is an important health tool. That’s why we want to spread the word that depression screening is a covered Medicare benefit.”

The community profiles, and the county profiles HQSI developed for the New Jersey counties declared federal disaster areas after Superstorm Sandy, are available at [www.hqsi.org](http://www.hqsi.org).

###

## **About HQSI**

*Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc. partners with healthcare providers, organizations, communities, and consumers to make healthcare safer, more efficient, and more effective. Working under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HQSI is the nonprofit federally designated quality improvement organization (QIO) for New Jersey. Its methods include assessing opportunities for improvement, sharing best practices, and designing strategies with measurable and sustainable results. The goal is for consumers to receive high-quality, patient-centered care with the best possible outcomes. Learn more about HQSI at [www.hqsi.org](http://www.hqsi.org).*