



# Getting The Most Out of a Peer Review Program

What Every Health Plan Should Consider

# Introduction

Peer Review Programs are an important part of driving quality improvement throughout your organization and are essential in maintaining your organization’s credibility, supporting effective decision-making, building transparency and trust between patients and providers, and giving objective, unbiased reviews when it comes to medical claims.

In our experience, working with both the payers and providers, organizations struggle with the transactional nature of peer reviews and fail to think strategically when it comes to choosing a Peer Review Program, specifically those that are external.

Peer Review Programs add value to your organization in large ways, providing you valuable data, strategic insights, and careful analysis to track service utilization and optimize profit margins.

With this in mind, we hope our collection of resources helps point you in the right direction when it comes to determining the importance of utilizing a Peer Review Program within your organization. And if you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us directly. Our Peer Review Program experts are standing by.





# Why You Need a Peer Review Program



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# 5 Reasons Why You Do Need a Peer Review Program



Peer Review Programs are an essential part of the healthcare ecosystem. Why? They help hold healthcare organizations and providers accountable in addition to providing key educational resources for learning as well as evaluation.

A proven peer review program, like BHM's, can document and monitor that independent medical peer reviews are free from conflicts of interest, establish qualifications for clinical reviewers, address medical necessity and experimental treatment issues, have reasonable time periods for standard and expedited reviews, and appeals processes.

The peer review process also adds transparency, which in turn helps build trust between patients and providers. Here are 5 reasons you need a Peer Review Service Program.

## 1. To Reduce Risk

If there's a chance your case may be litigated or you have a case that seems fraudulent, A Peer Review Program can help reduce your risk for litigation or mitigate risk of errors. How? Peer Review Program audits provide insight that can help cut down on internal administrative costs and expedite day-to-day activities – by increasing accuracy and adding an outside view, this could mean less liability and fewer risk of fraud. Peer Review Programs, as an unbiased third party, add transparency and accuracy to help safeguard your practice.

## 2. To Add Expertise

If you don't have a specialist on hand for a certain case where one is required, it's possible that you may risk making an uninformed decision. Peer Review Programs have an extensive network of reviewers who cover a large range of specialties and sub-specialties, often nationwide.



This ensures that each case is given the highest level of expertise it needs. Access to specialists and sub-specialists could make all the difference in the event of an uncommon or rare case. If you are relying on a single doctor or in-house case manager to know all of the information for reviews, poor decisions and errors are more likely.



### 3. To Manage Appeals

If you deal with cases that are commonly appealed, you know that payers want objective decision making, uninfluenced by interested parties. Developing a strong partnership with A Peer Review Program shows your dedication to proper care delivery on a regular basis.

It's also possible that because of healthcare reform, you are required to have A Peer Review Program. If you are required to have one, you can rest assured that the Peer Review Program will help improve documentation processes, emphasize medical necessity criteria, address physician performance issues, and reduce conflicts of interest.

### 4. To Help Meet Deadlines

Peer Review Programs are required to adhere to strict federal and state guidelines, this means that you're assured that your review will be completed on time. And if you're tied to state and federal deadlines, working with A Peer Review Program will make sure you meet those deadlines on time.

### 5. To Provide Additional Resources

We all know that depending on your staff's resources and ability to carve out extra time in their schedules can be tricky if you are understaffed or lacking resources. This means that reviews handled in-house are more likely to be lost in the work load or overlooked.

Outsourcing can not only help cut costs but also preserve the important time resources of your staff, giving them time to focus on their crucial job duties.



# Mitigating Risk With an Independent Review Organization



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# Eliminating Risk with Independent Review Organizations

We've been talking a lot lately about how and where Independent Review Organizations, or Peer Review Programs, fit into denial management. The Peer Review process, which brings in an unbiased third party to help alleviate the pressure of reviewing claims, is an essential part of denial management.

We've touched on many of the different benefits of Peer Review Programs in previous blog posts, from how they affect your ROI to how they bring specialized expertise to reviews. This blog post focuses on the four main ways Peer Review Programs and external reviews can help eliminate risk within your organization.

## 1. Improving Documentation

Having an external reviewer, who is often a peer, can help ensure physicians pay closer attention to detail and documentation. Attention to detail and accuracy are key to reducing error and the possibility that an external review will be needed.

By helping encourage double-checking and accuracy, Peer Review Programs help reduce risk on the back-end, which in turn effects your ROI.



## 2. Uncovering Internal Issues

External reviews help you discover issues that might lie within your organizational structure, whether that is physician specific, event specific or even organization based. Deeper issues can be brought the surface because of external reviews.

By bringing these issues to the surface external reviews help address these problems in a timely manner. Uncovering and addressing organizational issues is a key way Peer Review Programs help to reduce risk and the potential of malpractice or litigation.

### 3. Reduce Conflicts of Interest

The certification of External reviewers and the review process help to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest between reviewers or at the organization level. When it comes to specific cases/reviews, an organization is required to certify that there are no conflicts of interest at the organization level.



The same is required of the reviewer. This helps reduce any risk that there might be a conflict of interest that could negatively impact a review.

### 4. Increase Quality

Peer Review Programs help improve member satisfaction through provision of an unbiased, evidenced-based external determination. Peer Review Programs have a standard set of criteria that guide decision-making and use the latest technology, helping to increase the quality of care your organization provides.

Since reviews are based purely on the fact that they provide unbiased decision, your staff can rest assured that their decision-making abilities won't be questioned. By freeing up medical directors and other administrators, external reviews ensure that executive staff can spend less time with the administrative burden and deal with larger tasks as needed.





# Choosing an Independent Review Organization



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# 5 Tips to Help You Choose an Independent Review Organization

Choosing a Peer Review Program can be a tough task. The importance of a Peer Review Program to help support effective decision making and give objective, unbiased reviews, can be crucial to your business. To ensure you choose a Peer Review Program that distinguishes itself through quality work, ongoing training, full compliance, and the latest technology, you'll want to do your research.

It's very important to trust the organization you choose and you always want to make sure they are industry certified. If you are in the first steps of choosing a Peer Review Program, here are 5 things to keep in mind.

## 1. Looking at Expertise & Quality

Experience and expertise should be a defining factor as look for a Peer Review Program. Does the Peer Review Program have experience in the specific area you need help in? Does the organization normally meet deadlines or exceeds industry standards for timeliness? Timeliness is very important when it comes to reviews, so don't forget to ask about it. What do they have to say about their reviewers?

Often a Peer Review Program's Independent Reviewers cover a large range of specialties and sub-specialties and cover all 50 states. Training is very often the key to success. Are the Peer Review Program's reviewers knowledgeable about the latest practices, guidelines, and processes? Ask about training and if the Peer Review Program's staff are given frequent internal training to ensure the highest quality of service.

## 2. CHECKING THE ACCREDITATION STATUS

Looking for a Peer Review vendor with a with HITRUST CSF certified data sharing system could be key for you getting the high quality, industry certified support you need. It's no secret data security can be the different between highest quality service and support and bad services or issues.

Don't forget that state and federal guidelines and regulations are also very important. Is the Peer Review Program compliant with those guidelines and regulations? Are they fully HIPAA compliant, and PPACA Healthcare Reform Compliant? How is data security monitored? Will the organization utilize Quality Committees and live request tracking? How is the organization continually improving their reviewer networks by confirming credentials?

### 3. Reviewing the Client Satisfaction Rating

If the organization can provide client references, you definitely want to see them. If you can speak with past clients to confirm the client satisfaction rating, that is even better. Asking the Peer Review Program's past clients about how work was completed or if timelines were met, will be very helpful. Don't forget to ask about the staff too. Was the staff knowledgeable and helpful during the process? Would that person recommend the organization again or recommend its services? These questions can be crucial in helping differentiate between Peer Review Programs.



### 4. Supplemental Support

You don't want to be left in the dark during the process. Supplemental support for the duration of the contract, with resources like: educational series, training, and customer requested training, shouldn't be downplayed. Does the Peer Review Program have comprehensive training on the processes and technology available for you and your staff? Frequent touch-base meetings and real-live customer service when it is needed, show the Peer Review Program's commitment to quality.

### 5. Innovative & Cost Effective Technology

In this day and age, innovative and cutting edge technology can save you time and money. So don't forget to research this very important component of a quality Peer Review Program. You want interfaces that are user friendly and open to multiple users. It may be innovative, but is the technology efficient and accurate? This is also a great question to ask. Don't forget to ask about customization. Being able to alter technology and portals to a custom fit solution for your organization can be extremely helpful.





# How Independent Review Organizations Can Save You Money



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# 3 Ways Independent Review Organizations Help You Save Money

We've been talking a lot lately about Independent Review Organizations and the appeals process that accompanies them. The role of the Peer Review Program in the appeals process is to provide an unbiased 3rd party opinion on complicated reviews, helping to assure that all reviews are given the time and care they deserve.

It's a common illusion in the healthcare industry that taking care of things in house is the best and easiest way to save money—however this isn't true when it comes to claim reviews. If you are trying to manage your denials in-house, it can actually be counterproductive if you're trying to save money and even time. Let's take a look at how outsourcing your Peer Review Programs can save you time and money.

## 1. The Ever-Changing Industry

The healthcare industry is always evolving. Whether it comes to technology or rules and regulations, it's often hard for an organization to keep up. Not only are organizations spending money to upgrade systems and train staff, it is also increasing the need for specialization with certain industries.



Staying relevant and up-to-date on newest technology, procedures and practices can cost organizations a lot of time and money. This is where A Peer Review Program comes in. Peer Review Programs are required to stay up-to-date with cutting edge technology and follow the current standards for appeals.

Hiring an external Peer Review Program can help you save the time and energy you may need to allocate to updating technology or training staff on new policies.

## 2. From Specialties to Sub-Specialties

Although it is possible that staff reviewing claims within your organization are aware of the broader vision and operations of providers, it's often unlikely that they would be able to accurately assess for medical necessity within very-specific disciplines unless they were within that area of expertise themselves.

Hiring, training, and retaining specialists is a costly investment for any organization, and as the increased need for hyper-specialization becomes unavoidable, you may have an infinite need for specialists. This is where a Peer Review Program comes in.

Peer Review Programs have access to reviewer networks with a wide variety of specialties and sub-specialties. Peer Review Programs at their core are designed to hire and train specialists who can review claims and determine whether or not the denial was valid – meaning you don't have to. This invaluable service comes in the form of an unbiased yet educated review of the claim, something which is only possible because they are independent of the organization they are reviewing.

### 3. Focused on the Facts

An accredited Peer Review Program works hand in hand with URAC's standards and takes an evidence-based approach to evaluating claims – from medical necessity criteria to reviews for pharmacy, disability, hospitals and worker's compensation.

But why outsource the work? Peer Review Programs are designed to fulfill this review function; this means they can process far more claims in a given time frame than an organization could on its own. This saves not only money but time as well. Don't forget, if you are scrambling with time or money to train staff, your internal reviews could suffer. Peer Review Programs are focused on facts and quality – they are there so you don't need to worry about doing something wrong – so why not use them!

## Conclusion

Having a Peer Review Program partner by your side is essential in this ever-changing healthcare landscape. Building transparency, credibility, and confidence for your organization, a Peer Review Program partner solidifies valuable attributes to aid in your organization's success.

But a true partner delivers more than just accurate numbers—your reports must deliver consistent reviews that fit your policies and provide detailed insight into your medical necessity claims. A meaningful partnership should deliver quality to your organization with additional insights to help you optimize profit margins.

Empower your organization and make confident decisions with a Peer Review Service partner who not only sees your organization's vision, but who also aligns with it, and puts your best interests first—a partner you can trust.



# Do You Know What to Look for in a Peer Review Program?

Are you looking for a Peer Review Program? Do you know what questions to ask and on what basis to compare?

Not all Peer Review Programs are equal. Therefore, it's important you understand the differences from one program to another, as these differences can determine the efficiency and effectiveness in how your claims process operates.

Contact us to obtain a free Evaluation Checklist that will help you choose a partner who will help your organization succeed.



## About BHM

BHM provides behavioral health and medical review services and performance improvement consulting to health plans, providers, ACOs, TPAs, workers' compensation, and other insurers nationally.

**Delivering accurate, on-time determinations is our purpose, cause, and passion.**

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To learn how BHM delivers accurate, on-time, and consistent reviews, contact BHM by phone, e-mail, or visit us:

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