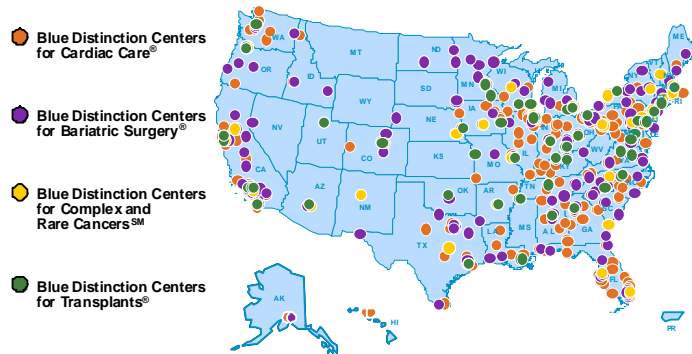


Blue Distinction® Program Overview

Blue Distinction is focused on the goal of raising the quality of care being delivered across the country by recognizing facilities that meet objective, evidence-based thresholds for clinical quality, developed in collaboration with expert physicians and medical organizations.

“Blue Distinction promotes the consistent practice of evidence-based medicine,” said Carole Flamm, M.D., M.P.H., executive medical director for the Blue

Cross and Blue Shield Association (BCBSA). “The Blues® are committed to working collaboratively with physicians and hospitals to raise the overall quality of healthcare in our nation. The Blue Distinction designation identifies institutions that lead the way in delivering quality outcomes.”



These institutions, referred to as Blue Distinction Centers for Specialty Care®, provide consumers with a credible, easily identifiable means of selecting facilities that meet their individual specialty care needs. To date, The Blues have awarded more than 800 Blue Distinction Center® designations across 45 states in the areas of bariatric surgery, cardiac care, complex and rare cancers, and transplants.

The nationally-consistent selection criteria used to evaluate facilities for Blue Distinction designations have been developed in collaboration with expert physicians and medical organizations, including:*

- **Blue Distinction Centers for Bariatric Surgery®**
 - American College of Surgeons (ACS)
 - American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS)
 - Surgical Review Corporation (SRC)
- **Blue Distinction Centers for Cardiac Care®**
 - American College of Cardiology (ACC)
 - Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS)
- **Blue Distinction Centers for Complex and Rare Cancers®**
 - National Comprehensive Cancer Network® (NCCN)
- **Blue Distinction Centers for Transplants®**
 - Center for International Blood and Marrow Transplant Research (CIBMTR)
 - Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR)
 - Foundation for the Accreditation of Cellular Therapy (FACT)

Detailed selection criteria for each of these Blue Distinction programs are available publicly at www.BCBS.com/bluedistinction, providing consumers with support for their healthcare decisions and facilities with a clinically established path for quality improvement.

Potential Blue Distinction Centers submit clinical data to establish that they meet our selection criteria thresholds. To maintain its Blue Distinction Center designation, each facility must reapply periodically for re-designation. This not only encourages continuing quality at the facility level, but it also provides an opportunity for The Blues® to work with expert physicians and medical organizations to determine if any of the Blue Distinction quality thresholds should be raised to reflect current clinical practice. This process fosters ongoing opportunities for improving the overall quality of care.

Blue companies continue to work proactively with facilities that do not receive the Blue Distinction designation, providing feedback reports detailing areas for improvement. Our goal is to improve quality for the entire Blue network, which includes 90 percent of the nation's hospitals.

An analysis of the 2005-06 Blue Distinction Center application (RFI) data confirmed that, overall, there are statistically significant variances when comparing Blue Distinction Centers to non-designated facilities.

- Blue Distinction Centers have 73 percent lower mortality rates one-year post heart transplants
- Blue Distinction Centers have 29 percent lower inpatient mortality rates post heart attack
- Blue Distinction Centers have 40 percent lower short-term major complications for bariatric surgery

Blue Distinction Centers for Bariatric Surgery, Blue Distinction Centers for Cardiac Care, Blue Distinction Centers for Complex and Rare Cancers and Blue Distinction Centers for Transplants are a key part of The Blues' efforts to collaborate with physicians and facilities to improve the overall quality, and resulting affordability, of specialty care. We look forward to expanding the Blue Distinction program in 2009, to include new Blue Distinction Centers for Specialty Care that will focus on spine surgery and joint replacement.

For additional information:

To obtain more information about Blue Distinction Centers, please contact your local Blue Cross and Blue Shield company or visit www.BCBS.com/bluedistinction.**

* These organizations have provided information and input but do not formally endorse the Blue Distinction Centers program.

** Some Blue companies may already participate in local specialty care programs. The Blue Distinction Centers do not disrupt or replace these existing programs. Blue members (who have coverage for these services) may not necessarily be required to use institutions that are part of this program.

Note: Designation as Blue Distinction Centers means these facilities' overall experience and aggregate data met objective criteria established in collaboration with expert clinicians' and leading professional organizations' recommendations. Individual outcomes may vary. To find out which services are covered under your policy at any facilities, please call your local Blue Cross and/or Blue Shield Plan.



**BlueCross BlueShield
Association**

An Association of Independent
Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans