

Finding Good Health Care

This guide lists some reliable sources for finding quality doctors, hospitals, health plans, and home health care services. All of the sources are available for free on the Web. For information on medical conditions, see the *Finding Medical Information* pathfinder.

Doctors

[WebMD Doctorfinder](http://doctor.webmd.com/physician_finder/home.aspx?sponsor=core) (doctor.webmd.com/physician_finder/home.aspx?sponsor=core)

WebMD is a free Web site offering information on all aspects of health, including the choice of doctors. The directory allows for searching by name, location, and specialties (usually signifying board certifications--see *American Board of Medical Specialties*, below), and insurance and hospital affiliations. The entries include other information, such as education and years in practice. It is wise to keep in mind that some information, such as hospital and health plan affiliations and specialties/board certifications may need to be verified in other sources listed below or with the doctors' offices.

[Vitals](http://www.vitals.com) (www.vitals.com)

This is a source much like *WebMD Doctorfinder* (above), but with patient ratings.

[American Board of Medical Specialties](http://abms.org) (abms.org)

This is an umbrella organization made up of individual specialty medical boards that certify doctors in various specialties. "Specialties" is really misleading, as even general practitioners, such as internists, family practitioners, and gynecologists have their own boards. Although there are differences among the boards, essentially, board certification signifies the successful completion of a residency (a few years of post-graduate training), the passing of an exam (and, increasingly, re-examination every few years,) and some form of continuing education program. Something to keep in mind when using other sources is that a doctor's mere self-described medical specialty need not correspond to a board certification. This free site is the best to verify current board certifications.

[Medicare Participating Physicians' Directory](http://www.medicare.gov/find-a-doctor/provider-search.aspx) (www.medicare.gov/find-a-doctor/provider-search.aspx, 1-800-MED-ICARE)

Licensed doctors who accept Medicare can be found here. Search options and information provided are similar to those found in the *WebMD* and *Vitals* directories (above).

[Illinois Division of Professional Regulation](http://www.idfpr.com) (www.idfpr.com, 312-814-4500)

This is the state department responsible for the licensing of physicians (along with many other occupations.) Their "Look-up" feature can tell you if a doctor is currently licensed to practice in Illinois, and if there are, or have been, any department disciplinary sanctions against him/her. You can also initiate your own complaint here. Even though you may come across references in other sources to the information found here, it is best to check here for the latest and most accurate information.

Your Insurance Provider (varies)

If your health plan provides access to only a narrow pool of doctors, you may want to check with your provider first. In any case you may want to verify with your provider (or the doctor's office) the information found in directory sites like *WebMD* or *Vitals* (above).

Hospitals and Nursing Homes

[Illinois Department of Public Health Hospital Report Card](http://www.healthcarereportcard.illinois.gov) (www.healthcarereportcard.illinois.gov)

The department uses data compiled by itself and The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to evaluate Illinois hospitals on the bases of treatment outcomes, frequency of recommended care protocols, and patient surveys. Information is largely the same as presented in *Medicare Hospital Compare* (below). For Department of Veterans Affairs facilities, see next entry.

[Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital Compare](http://www.hospitalcompare.va.gov/index.asp) (www.hospitalcompare.va.gov/index.asp)

Use this site to evaluate Department of Veterans Affairs facilities. The information is compiled by the Department itself.

[Medicare Hospital Compare](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov/Hospital/Search/Welcome.asp) (www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov/Hospital/Search/Welcome.asp)

Medicare is responsible for compiling most of the information on hospitals found, not only at its own site, but at the *Illinois Department of Public Health Hospital Report Card* as well.

[U.S. News & World Report America's Best Hospitals](http://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals) (in print in library and on Web at health.usnews.com/best-hospitals)

In one of its summer issues each year, the magazine ranks hospitals by specialty and geography. More information is given at the magazine's Web site at the address above. The magazine uses various criteria, including surveys of healthcare professionals and Medicare data.

[Joint Commission](http://www.qualitycheck.org/consumer/searchQCR.aspx) (www.qualitycheck.org/consumer/searchQCR.aspx)

The Joint Commission is a private organization that accredits health care institutions, including hospitals, nursing homes, and home health care providers.

[Medicare Nursing Home Compare](http://www.medicare.gov) (www.medicare.gov, place mouse on "Resource Locator", click "Nursing Homes")

Operates much like the *Medicare Hospital Compare* (above)

Health Plans/Medicare

[National Committee for Quality Assurance Report Card](http://hprc.ncqa.org/index.asp) (hprc.ncqa.org/index.asp, 888-275-7585)

The *National Committee for Quality Assurance* is an independent non-profit organization that evaluates and accredits health care plans.

[Medicare & You](http://medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/pdf/10050.pdf) (medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/pdf/10050.pdf, 1-800-med-icare)

This general handbook to Medicare benefits is one of the many health information sources published by the Medicare office, which are available in print and in full text on its Web site (see entries above for its physicians directory and nursing home database.)

[About.com Health Insurance Guide](http://healthinsurance.about.com/od/healthinsurancebasics/u/Uninsured.htm) (healthinsurance.about.com/od/healthinsurancebasics/u/Uninsured.htm)

This is one of About.com's Web guides that provides expert information for the health insurance consumer.

Home Care

[Suburban Area on Aging](http://www.suburban-age.org) (www.suburban-age.org, 708-383-0258)

This is a not-for-profit corporation set up by the Illinois Department on Aging to distribute funds to more than 35 local community agencies that provide services to older persons in suburban Cook County. The Web site is a good place to search for home healthcare services, among other things, for the elderly.

[Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations](http://www.jointcommission.org/) (http://www.jointcommission.org/, 630-792-5000)

This organization evaluates health care organizations of all types, including those delivering home health care (See above entry under *Hospitals/Nursing Homes*)