



THE HEART OF THE MATTER:

# Understanding the Cardiac System of Care and Joint Commission Certifications





## IMPROVING PATIENT CARE AND SAFETY

Timely diagnosis and treatment of heart disease means better patient outcomes, making consistent, high-quality cardiac care essential.

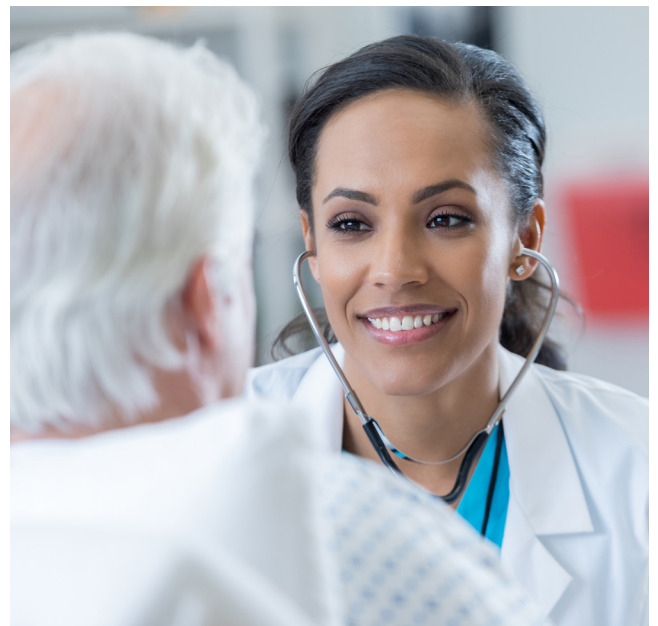
For more than 70 years, The Joint Commission has led the charge to improve patient care and safety. As best practices evolve in medicine, The Joint Commission grows to meet the needs of healthcare organizations. In recent years, The Joint Commission partnered with the American Heart Association (AHA) to develop a variety of cardiac certifications within a complete cardiac system of care. This partnership provides the highest national standards for safe, high-quality patient care.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CARDIAC LEVELS OF CARE

Comprehensive cardiac care can best be visualized as a hub and spoke model — with shared responsibilities within the care system.

The center of the hub begins with hospitals that provide comprehensive cardiac services for every cardiovascular disorder, whereas the spokes represent organizations that provide specific cardiac services within their communities.

The Joint Commission offers different [cardiac certification levels](#) to represent the services an organization can provide for patients experiencing chest pain related to acute coronary syndrome (ACS), including ST-elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) patients.





### LEVEL III

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## Acute Heart Attack Ready

Acute Heart Attack Ready (AHAR) programs provide essential care as spokes in the cardiac system of care as they identify ACS patients with a strong focus on those with STEMI – making these facilities a major player in the safe, quality care of patients with cardiac conditions.

- AHAR organizations are STEMI-referring hospitals that may or may not perform primary percutaneous cardiac interventions (PCIs). AHAR hospitals may transfer STEMI patients to a center with more comprehensive services.
- Level III centers must provide emergency cardiac services and refer patients to higher levels of care and additional services as appropriate.



### LEVEL II

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## Primary Heart Attack Center

Another spoke on the wheel of the cardiac system of care is the Primary Heart Attack Center (PHAC). PHAC certification is ideal for hospitals performing primary PCI and receiving referrals from other facilities. Hospitals with this certification will refer patients for cardiac surgery or more complex services as needed.



### LEVEL I

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## Comprehensive Heart Attack Center

Level I Comprehensive Heart Attack Centers (CHAC) build upon the services available at Level II and III hospitals. This designation is for hospitals performing both cardiac surgical services and primary PCI 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year.

- Level I centers also excel at providing care to patients with cardiogenic shock and cardiac arrest and provide care along the continuum including cardiac rehab.
- CHAC programs are a hub in the cardiac systems of care but may refer patients for cardiovascular services they do not offer.



### ADDITIONAL LEVEL

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## Comprehensive Cardiac Center

The Comprehensive Cardiac Center (CCC) designation is for hospitals that are the ultimate hub of the cardiac system of care. They deliver care for every touch point and for every cardiovascular disorder in the cardiac care continuum. Centers at this level also incorporate disease prevention efforts by identifying and addressing risk factors as well as disease management in inpatient and outpatient settings.





## PRIMARY BASIS FOR CARDIAC SYSTEM OF CARE

In 2022, the AHA published a policy statement, [Systems of Care for ST-Segment-Elevation Myocardial Infarction](#). This policy provides a framework that improves the care of cardiac patients along the entire spectrum and levels of care. Specifically, the AHA statement identifies common barriers at the different points of care and ways to overcome these roadblocks.

Although the policy calls out the care of STEMI patients (due to the critical nature of the condition), the principles apply to all time-sensitive cardiac disorders. Early recognition and treatment of symptoms are the vital threads connecting each level within the cardiac care system.

## CONTINUING THE FIGHT AGAINST HEART DISEASE

Significant improvements in cardiac care have been made, though in recent years progress has slowed.

To keep the momentum going, a concerted effort must be made to adopt new practices. Cardiac certification provides centers the opportunity to do just that. Certified centers are at the forefront of the emerging science to not only diagnose but improve the quality of life for patients.



## CARDIAC CERTIFICATION IMPROVES CARE

Beyond opportunities for care advancement, cardiac certification provides a common foundation for hospitals to ensure patients receive the best evidence-based care possible along the entire continuum of need.

Each level of certification requires health systems to adopt performance improvement activities related to ACS. For instance, organizations must adopt standardized performance measures and participate in applicable registries that assist in quality and performance improvement tracking.

Certification is the vehicle that develops reliable processes to assess, diagnose, and treat ACS in all its varieties. On the journey towards service excellence in cardiac care, The Joint Commission's goal is to provide hospitals the tools they need to improve heart health in their communities.



**Questions about Joint Commission Cardiac Certifications?** Visit our [web page](https://www.jointcommission.org) at [jointcommission.org](https://www.jointcommission.org) or [contact us](#) to learn more, access resources and discover next steps.

