Dear colleague,

We want to contribute to your organization’s success. CARF can help your organization meet the many challenges it faces in achieving quality outcomes for persons served while maintaining a healthy bottom line and ensuring long-term organizational survival. I would like to share with you the many benefits of accreditation — some of which you may know about and others that set CARF apart.

**Well-known CARF accreditation benefits**

- **Business improvement** – 98 percent of CARF’s customers report accreditation helps improve their business.
- **Risk management** – Conformance to CARF standards helps organizations manage risk.
- **Funding access** – Accreditation can help secure reimbursement from regulators, funders, and payers and greater access to capital from lenders.
- **Positive visibility** – Accreditation is a public seal of trust and commitment to quality.
- **Accountability** – Accreditation helps demonstrate transparency and accountability to stakeholders.
- **Peer network** – CARF provides a link to a network of other leaders and service providers in your industry who face the same challenges. Many of these individuals present at CARF educational venues and contribute articles to the CARF Connection, a free bimonthly newsletter (www.carf.org/subscribe), addressing many of the challenges and offering possible solutions.

**Additional offerings that distinguish CARF from all other accreditors and demonstrate the extended value of CARF and accreditation**

- **Potential insurance premium savings** – Insurers consider CARF-accredited organizations a lower risk. To my knowledge, CARF is the only accreditor publicly recognized by insurers across all areas of accreditation. Because of this recognition, CARF-accredited organizations may receive a significant insurance premium discount.
- **E-learning for persons with disabilities and human service professionals** – Access to thousands of hours of corporate quality, tuition-free, online training in a variety of professional development and career-related areas in EditU. Annual membership to ARPCT (www.arpct.org) of $495 provides unlimited access to EditU and is an excellent return on investment and a cost-effective way to leverage resources.
- **Consumer reporting system** – CARF developed uSPEQ® to anonymously and confidentially gather consumer feedback on organizations’ services and help improve organizational quality. This turnkey, cost-effective solution frees organizations from the burden of development, maintenance, and support and provides “independent” reporting from a credible third-party vendor.

For more information about these benefits of CARF accreditation, please call us toll free (888) 281-6531 or visit our website (www.carf.org).

Thank you for your commitment to quality services.

Regards,

Brian J. Boon, Ph.D.
President/CEO
About CARF

Founded in 1966, CARF is an international, independent, non-profit accreditor of human service providers and networks. The CARF group of companies includes CARF International, CARF Canada, and CARF Europe and assists service providers in improving the quality of their services, demonstrating value, and meeting internationally recognized organizational and program standards.

CARF’s mission

CARF’s mission is to promote the quality, value, and optimal outcomes of services through a consultative accreditation process and continuous improvement services that center on enhancing the lives of persons served.

What is Accreditation?

When a program or service is CARF-accredited, it means your organization has passed an in-depth review and meets rigorous CARF guidelines for service and quality—a qualified endorsement that it conforms to internationally recognized service standards and is focused on delivering the most favorable results for the persons it serves. The human service field, including all stakeholders, develops the standards that are applied on CARF surveys.

Accreditation promotes active, dynamic planning that is focused on outcomes and impact to stakeholders.

Accreditation areas

A provider earns accreditation by demonstrating conformance to CARF’s internationally recognized standards. CARF accredits providers for their specific programs and services, and many providers seek CARF accreditation in more than one area. CARF standards manuals used to accredit programs and services are:

- Aging Services
- Behavioral Health
- Child and Youth Services
- Continuing Care Retirement Communities
- DMEPOS (Durable Medical Equipment, Prosthetics, Orthotics, and Supplies)
- Employment and Community Services
- Medical Rehabilitation
- Opioid Treatment Programs
- Vision Rehabilitation Services

Scan the QR code or go to www.carf.org/Programs to read full descriptions of the programs/services CARF accredits.
Why Choose CARF?

CARF accreditation is a seal of approval announcing to persons served and their families that you provide services focused on their needs. It is a sign of assurance to third-party payers and governmental regulators that you have met internationally recognized standards, and it is a tool for quality improvement within your organization.

The value of accreditation is more than a certificate hanging on the wall. It is evidence that your organization strives to improve efficiency, fiscal health, and service delivery—creating a foundation for consumer satisfaction.

Organizations that have participated in an accreditation survey demonstrate:

- A higher degree of internal quality.
- Greater involvement of persons served in their services.
- Increased cohesion among staff members at all levels within the organization.
- Enhanced status of the surveyed services within the community.

Business Strategy
Continuous quality improvement process
Management tool for top-to-bottom evaluation and efficiency
Aligns with pay-for-performance model

Competitive Differentiation
Positive visibility
Funding/contracting preference

Value of Accreditation

Risk Management
Reduced risks of violations in ethic and client rights
Increased accessibility

Service Excellence
Performance measurement and outcomes oriented
Consistent delivery and increased effectiveness of services
Standards updated annually—current with field best practices

Accountability
Transparency and accountability to stakeholders

Scan the QR code or visit http://tinyurl.com/aboutcarf to hear from industry leaders about the value of accreditation and their experiences with CARF.
What else does CARF offer?

**Publications and resources**

CARF publishes annual standards manuals and survey preparation workbooks that correspond to areas of accreditation. The standards manuals are updated annually to ensure that they reflect current, practical, and relevant standards for quality. Visit the online store at [www.carf.org/catalog](http://www.carf.org/catalog).

CARF also offers free online resources and newsletters, such as the *Promising Practices* series. More information is available at [www.carf.org/Resources](http://www.carf.org/Resources).

**Education**

CARF offers regional and web-based trainings and informative online webinars. Sessions on preparing for or maintaining accreditation are excellent ways for your organization to receive information about the application of the standards, the survey process, and CARF’s policies and procedures. Area and topic-focused webinars and recordings can be purchased to train on your schedule.

Please visit [www.carf.org/Events](http://www.carf.org/Events) for current educational events and opportunities.

**Data and feedback information**

uSPEQ® data and information services were developed by CARF for providers to gather feedback from persons served on their experiences with a program, service, or provider and from employees on the organizational climate.

Providers use the confidential reported information to improve the quality of programs and services. The information is independent from the accreditation process, although having it during the process can help you meet standards for data collection, analysis, and use for performance improvement.

Visit [www.uspeq.org](http://www.uspeq.org) for more information.

**Consultation**

A designated resource specialist is available to provide guidance and technical assistance during the entire survey preparation process as well as throughout the term of accreditation. Call or go to [www.carf.org/contact-us](http://www.carf.org/contact-us).

**Benefits of CARF accreditation:**

- Business strategy
- Continuous quality improvement
- Service excellence
- Competitive differentiation
- Risk management
- Accountability and transparency

**Have confidence in your choice; become an accredited provider**

The CARF family of organizations currently includes nearly 60,000 accredited programs and services at more than 27,900 locations on five continents.

**Who is accredited?**

Use our provider search to see what other organizations have accredited programs and services. Go to [www.carf.org/providerSearch.aspx](http://www.carf.org/providerSearch.aspx).

More than 12.3 million persons are served annually by organizations with CARF-accredited programs/services. Become part of the family; contact us today!
What is CARF?
CARF International was established in 1966 and is an independent, nonprofit accreditor of health and human services. Through accreditation, CARF assists service providers to improve the quality of their services and impact outcomes for persons served.

What is accreditation and why does it matter?
Accreditation is an impartial and independent review with a more global scope than what licensing or certification can provide. Accreditation is evidence that your organization strives to improve efficiency, fiscal health, and service delivery—creating a foundation for continuous quality improvement and consumer satisfaction.

CARF accreditation is a continuous quality improvement process where peers apply internationally-recognized standards to an organization’s programs/services through a consultative on-site survey. Accreditation addresses stakeholder needs for accountability in efficiency, fiscal health, outcomes of services, and satisfaction with services and the organization.

What distinguishes CARF?
CARF accreditation is a partnership between CARF and the service provider. The survey process is consultative rather than prescriptive and is a valuable resource to address many of the challenges facing providers. In addition to interviewing staff members, persons served, and their families, the surveyors observe organizational practices, review appropriate documentation, answer questions, and suggest ways to improve operations and service delivery. In addition to standards for programming and service delivery, CARF has robust standards for business practices. Known as ASPIRE to Excellence®, these standards support organizations’ efforts to build their foundation and sustain and grow their business.

Fees are not based on organizational revenue. CARF’s fee structure is based on the number of surveyors and days needed to complete the survey plus travel expenses.

Who are the surveyors?
Surveyors are peer professionals in the field who are often employed by organizations that have CARF-accredited programs or services. We recruit and train the most highly qualified professionals to conduct surveys. As a result, the surveyors who come to your organization during an on-site survey are among the most knowledgeable and respected experts in the field of human services.

What are the areas of accreditation?
CARF annually accredits thousands of programs/services across the continuum of care, serving children to seniors.

Given the diverse needs of the various populations, programs/services that CARF accredits are organized into standards manuals for the areas of accreditation.

Program areas accredited by CARF are:
- Aging Services
- Behavioral Health
- Child and Youth Services
- Employment and Community Services
- Medical Rehabilitation
- Opioid Treatment Program
- Vision Rehabilitation Services

To view all programs available for accreditation, visit www.carf.org/Programs.

Providers can seek accreditation using the program standards that match their multi-faceted services.

How are the standards developed?
The CARF standards have evolved and been refined for more than 50 years. CARF convenes its International Advisory Council, as well as specialty groups to systematically review and revise the standards and develop standards for new accreditation opportunities. These committees and groups, composed of professionals with expertise and experience as well as persons served, make recommendations to CARF about the standards. This input is used to develop proposed new and revised standards, which are then made available for review by the public, persons served, providers, surveyors, national professional groups, advocacy groups, third-party purchasers, and other stakeholders.

What are the elements of accreditation?
The CARF accreditation process starts with an organization’s commitment to continuous improvement and culminates with external review and recognition that the business and service practices meet international standards of quality—with all the steps in between focused on optimal outcomes for the persons served and sustained organizational success.

Once committed to accreditation, the organization should conduct a thorough self-evaluation that applies the relevant accreditation standards against actual program or service practices before requesting a survey.

On-site survey
The survey process is rooted in peer review and networking. The on-site survey team of professional peers provides an impartial, external review of conformance to the accreditation standards. Surveyors can provide confirmation of what you are doing well and offer consultation for ongoing quality improvement.

Organizations choose a two-month timeframe in which they would like to have the site survey and are informed of the scheduled dates. No surprise visits.

Accreditation report
After the survey, CARF issues a report highlighting strengths and areas for improvement based on the organization’s level of conformance to the standards. A letter informing the organization of the accreditation decision accompanies the report.

Improvement plan
Equipped with the accreditation report information, the organization prepares a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) to address the areas for improvement. CARF reviews the plan for completeness and is available to assist in developing the plan.

Annual reporting
To maintain accreditation, an organization will review new and revised standards each year and update policies and practices as needed to ensure ongoing conformance to the standards. Leadership is required to send a signed commitment, called an Annual Conformance to Quality Report, stating that it is using the current CARF standards to guide the organization. Maintaining accreditation is a commitment to continuous quality improvement.

A full list of the steps to accreditation is available at www.carf.org/StepsToAccreditation.
What are the steps to accreditation?

(If your organization is applying for a CARF survey, please review the complete steps to accreditation published in the standards manuals. Learn about our quality standards and visit our Online Store to obtain a standards manual.)

The steps to accreditation involve a year or more of preparation before the site survey and ongoing quality improvement following the survey.

1. Consult with a designated CARF resource specialist to provide guidance and technical assistance regarding the accreditation process.

2. Conduct a self-evaluation. The service provider conducts a self-study and evaluation of its conformance to the standards.

3. Submit the survey application. The survey application includes detailed information about leadership, programs, and services that the service provider is seeking to accredit and the service delivery location(s).

4. CARF invoices for the survey fee. The CARF fee is based on the number of surveyors and days needed to complete the survey. The CCRC fee is fixed, with additional fees if additional programs are added to the survey.

5. CARF selects the survey team. Surveyors are selected by matching their program or administrative expertise and relevant field experience with the service provider’s unique requirements.

6. The survey team conducts the survey and determines the service provider’s conformance to all applicable standards on site by observing services, interviewing persons served and other stakeholders, and reviewing documentation. Surveyors also provide consultation to provider’s personnel.

7. CARF renders an accreditation outcome. CARF reviews the survey findings and renders one of the following accreditation decisions:

   **CARF**
   - Three-Year Accreditation
   - One-Year Accreditation
   - Provisional Accreditation
   - Nonaccreditation

   **CCRC**
   - Five-Year Term of Accreditation
   - Nonaccreditation

Approximately six to eight weeks after the survey, CARF notifies the organization of the accreditation outcome and sends it a written survey report and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

8. Submit a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Within 90 days after notification of the accreditation outcome, the service provider fulfills an accreditation condition by submitting to CARF a QIP outlining the actions that have been or will be taken in response to the recommendations made in the survey report. The QIP form can be downloaded from Customer Connect.
9. **Submit an Annual Conformance to Quality Report (ACQR).** A service provider that earns accreditation submits to CARF a signed ACQR on the accreditation anniversary date in each of the years following the award. CARF sends the service provider the form for this report approximately ten weeks before it is due.

With their ACQR, accredited CCRCs also submit an annual QIP if updates have been made.

10. **CARF maintains contact with the service provider** during the accreditation tenure. Providers are also encouraged to contact CARF as needed to help maintain conformance to CARF standards.

**Working with surveyors and preparing for accreditation**

As providers of services, the survey team conforms to the same standards that your organization does. They are in the business of promoting independence in the lives of persons with disabilities and others in need of services. Even though you work in different settings and in different parts of the country, surveyors come to your organization believing that you have embraced CARF’s goal that the persons you serve are safe, satisfied, and treated with dignity and respect.

All sites should be prepared for a visit, and all employees should know what's going on. The site survey is not designed to contain surprises. You know where your organization's strengths lie and where you may have weaknesses or challenges. The survey process is designed to look for consistency in policies and procedures.

During the survey, designate a staff person to be the main contact for arranging the schedule and retrieving needed materials and documents. There is a great deal of material to cover in a short time, so try not to tie up the survey team's time with conversations other than ones about the survey at hand. However, please use the them as a resource and for consultation. Take advantage of their expertise, experience, and ideas.

Your documentation should be current and well organized. The survey team should not have to dig deep to see that you conform to the standards.

Select individuals for personal interviews who can easily express themselves. Your board members need to receive sufficient information about the accreditation process so that they too are prepared for interviews. This is your organization's opportunity to shine, not to make excuses for poor performance.

The CARF survey is an ongoing process, don't shelve the manuals after your survey, even if your organization is not being resurveyed in the coming months. Each year, CARF seeks input from people active in the field as part of the standards development process. The CARF standards are excellent mirrors of the current thinking in the field.
## Benefits of CARF Accreditation

Accreditation affords many benefits to an organization, persons served, and other stakeholders, including:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Benefits of Accreditation:</th>
<th>Consumer</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Payer</th>
<th>Regulator</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identification as an organization meeting internationally developed standards in the provision of quality services.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence on the part of persons seeking such services for themselves or family members.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence on the part of funding sources, referral agencies, other providers, businesses, community leaders, and community resource and service organizations.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Guidance in the form of the CARF International standards for providing high quality services, implementing strategies for performance improvement, and developing specific policies and procedures in all areas, from the organizational structure to daily routines.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Independent, external review to identify strengths and areas for improvement based on objective program expectations and guidelines that are common to all CARF-accredited organizations.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>On-site education and consultation to help refocus business on the persons served and integrate business functions with service delivery.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>An internal management tool promoting active, dynamic planning focused on positive outcomes for persons served and other stakeholders, the impact of strategies on these key groups, and organizational development of existing or new services to meet the needs and expectations of the community served.</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>Increased funding and reimbursement opportunities created by stronger relationships and partnerships with purchasers and regulatory bodies. Relationships are developed through the process of gaining input on program standards.</td>
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<td>Participation in insurance programs that offer discounted premiums to eligible providers.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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### The Benefits of CARF Accreditation:

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<tr>
<th>Practices that demonstrate:</th>
<th>Consumer</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Payer</th>
<th>Regulator</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Accountability</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Positive outcomes</td>
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<td>- An interdisciplinary approach to service delivery</td>
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<td>- Teamwork within the organization</td>
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<td>- Ongoing professional growth of personnel</td>
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<td>- Networking with other providers and resources</td>
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<td>- Comprehensive financial management</td>
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<tr>
<td>- An overall focus on service to the person served</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Evidence of practice can be used in:

- Marketing services to consumers and referral sources
- Seeking grants
- Conducting fundraising events
- Advocacy activities
- Public education

Ideas for management in designing and implementing organizational and financial systems that are well organized, cost efficient, effective, and based on outcomes and satisfaction of the persons served and other stakeholders.

Enhanced risk management, which may lead to reduced exposure and insurance premiums.

Access to thousands of hours of corporate quality, tuition-free, on-line training in a variety of professional development and career related areas in EditU - the online campus for persons with disabilities and those who serve them. Annual membership to ARPCT (www.arpct.org) of $495 provides unlimited access to EditU and is an excellent return on investment and a cost-effective way to leverage resources.
Realizing a Return on Investment in Accreditation

Many provider organizations consider accreditation as a business strategy to support performance improvement. Anecdotally, they report many benefits of integrating CARF’s field-driven standards into the culture of their organizations to continuously improve the quality of their services. Often named benefits of the organization’s investment in accreditation include:

- peer review and consultation conducted by an independent, third-party accreditor;
- self-evaluation that discloses policies and procedures in need of improvement;
- increased satisfaction in the organization expressed by the persons served, leadership, and staff; and
- improved employee team communication and interaction.

Although these benefits are important to organizations, at times they are seen as not quantifiable and, thus, not a sufficient impetus to pursue accreditation. However, one company tracked its return on investment (ROI) in accreditation and discovered measurable and positive results of the accreditation experience.

One company’s experience

The Senior Resource Group (SRG) is a network of accredited assisted living residences with 1,000 employees on 13 campuses throughout Oregon, California, and Arizona. The company serves 2,800 residents living in 2,000 units and offers a continuum of support to accommodate its residents’ evolving needs — from independent and assisted living services to secured Alzheimer’s/dementia care.

CARF asked SRG to measure its performance in key operational areas before pursuing accreditation and to measure them again after its campuses became accredited, taking into consideration any unusual or mitigating circumstances that could skew the data. Because SRG already had measurement systems and internal audit processes to provide reliable information to management, the company was able to easily make clear comparisons of its performance before and after accreditation.

SRG measured key indicators in the operational areas of personnel, marketing to potential residents, satisfaction, health and safety, facility and operational audits, insurance, financial performance, and information systems. The company reported that all of these areas realized positive impacts as a result of the accreditation experience. (See accompanying ROI for SRG highlights.)

Kayda Johnson, Chief Operating Officer of SRG, stated, “I think we were already performing at a high level, and we still saw improvement as a result of the survey process. I would think the ROI in accreditation might even be greater in other organizations.”
Organizations that wish to measure their ROI in accreditation should review what areas they currently measure, such as personnel turnover, workers’ compensation claims, customer and staff satisfaction, and various operational costs, so that they have a basis for comparing data pre- and post-accreditation. Without reliable measurement systems in place before pursuing accreditation, organizations will find it nearly impossible to have an accurate basis of comparison to determine the true ROI in accreditation.

**Improvement must be sustained over time**

Although SRG saw improvements by preparing for accreditation, the key for it and other organizations to sustain improvement over time is to continually apply the standards, even when an accreditation survey is not about to occur. From Ms. Johnson’s perspective, the real value of accreditation is that SRG “continues to use the standards in all areas of our organization. We are always looking for ways to improve, so we have integrated the standards into the way we work in our organization. Even if we are not evaluating ourselves in preparation for an accreditation survey, we are still referring to the standards and using them daily. By doing so, in combination with measuring our performance, we will continue to see a return on our investment in accreditation.”

An added benefit, Ms. Johnson noted, is that the accreditation process gave employees a “better understanding of how all the metrics tie together. We are pleased with the overall results of accreditation for our entire portfolio. Since accreditation was new to our organization, a pleasant surprise was the overwhelming pride that everyone exhibited before, during, and after the surveys. We are proud because all of our campuses have been accredited.”

CARF will continue to measure the ROI of accreditation with aging services providers in the accreditation process in this and coming years. For more information about the ROI study, please contact CARF toll free at (888) 281-6531.

A condensed version of this article appeared in *FutureAge* magazine, a former publication of [LeadingAge](https://www.leadingage.org).
ROI for SRG

Here are highlights of the positive impacts that the Senior Resource Group (SRG) tracked as a result of accreditation:

**Personnel**
- Employee turnover decreased 7 percent.
- Workers' compensation claims decreased by 7 percent as a percentage of the employee base.

**Marketing to potential residents**
- 1,450 more leads were received.
- 1,118 more tours were requested.

**Satisfaction**
- Employee and resident satisfaction scores were maintained at a level greater than 4.0 (out of a possible maximum of 5.0), despite opening 3 large communities with more than 500 new residents and approximately the same number of new hires.

**Resident health and safety**
- Resident falls decreased by 2 percent.
- Psychotropic drug administration was halved for residents.
- Medication administration errors decreased by approximately 34 percent.
- Elopements decreased by approximately 15 percent, even with the opening of two new communities.
- State health survey deficiencies decreased by 40 percent.

**Facility and operational audits**
- Individual sites' performance on internal, unannounced facility audits to review the physical plant exceeded the SRG target by approximately 3 percent after accreditation.

**Financial performance**
- Cost of vehicular maintenance decreased by $831 per campus, despite the addition of 10 vehicles.
- Cost of facility supplies decreased on average by approximately $2,700 per campus.

**Information systems**
- After implementing CARF–CCAC’s performance measurement and information management standards, SRG’s database for tracking and trending was strengthened in its reliability and validity and was further enhanced so that management feels more confident in basing decisions on this information.