

# Finding Good Health Care

This guide lists some reliable sources for finding quality doctors, hospitals, and health plans. All the sources are free.

## **Doctors**

The internet has greatly enhanced our ability to find information, including evaluative information on doctors. The information to be found at these sites is gleaned from various sources, including the doctors (and patients) themselves. Complete accuracy cannot be assumed in every case, so it is best to try more than one site.

[Illinois Division of Professional Regulation](http://www.idfpr.com/applications/professionprofile) (www.idfpr.com/applications/professionprofile)

This is the link to their Physician Profile Search, which now gives not only the history of state licensure and disciplinary actions (if any) taken by the department since 1990, but many other useful pieces of information: education, board certifications, residencies, hospital affiliations, malpractice cases, etc. This is the definitive source for disciplinary actions, so it should probably be included in any search.

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

Like other private sites of this type, *Vitals* is a good source for patient reviews, though it should be kept in mind that, like most internet reviews, these are not ordinarily vetted, though there is a challenge process doctors can avail themselves of in case of perceived unfair treatment at the hands of patients. Also, *Vitals* is very good about listing insurances accepted and office information, board certifications, and self-reported specialties, but it is less good than the others when it comes to documenting such things as doctors' educations, state medical board disciplinary actions and malpractice actions.

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

This is an umbrella organization made up of individual medical boards that certify doctors in various specialties. "Specialties" is really misleading, as even general practitioners 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. Though information about board certification is routinely reported at the other sites, this free site is the primary source in that regard.

[healthgrades](http://www.healthgrades.com) (www.healthgrades.com)

Like *Vitals*, *healthgrades* is a private, for-profit site that offers patient reviews (see *Vitals* entry, above), and office, insurance, and background information. It does better than *Vitals* in regards to documenting doctors' education and disciplinary/malpractice actions, reporting the most recent five years of the latter (see *Illinois Division of Professional Regulation* entry, above.)

[Angie's List](http://www.angieslist.com) (www.angieslist.com)

*Angie's List* started as a review site for home improvement companies, but for a while has been reviewing doctors. What's more, it can now be used for free, though premium memberships offering enhanced services can be had for a fee.

## **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 various federal agencies like CMS, CDC, and AHRQ to evaluate Illinois hospitals on the bases of treatment outcomes, frequency of recommended care protocols, and patient surveys. Information is an augmented version of [Medicare Hospital Compare](http://www.medicare.gov/hospitalcompare/search.html) (www.medicare.gov/hospitalcompare/search.html).

[Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital Compare](http://catalog.data.gov/dataset/va-hospital-compare) (catalog.data.gov/dataset/va-hospital-compare)

Use this site to evaluate Department of Veterans Affairs facilities. The information is compiled by the Department with help from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

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

The Joint Commission is a private organization that accredits health care institutions, including hospitals, nursing homes, and home health care providers. It relies on its own data gathering and analysis.

[healthgrades](http://www.healthgrades.com) (www.healthgrades.com)

*healthgrades* also rates hospitals (see entry in previous section) using data generated by federal and state agencies, but enhanced with some proprietary statistical analysis.

[U.S. News & World Report America's Best Hospitals](http://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals) (health.usnews.com/best-hospitals)

In one of its special 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.

[Medicare Nursing Home Compare](http://www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare) (www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare)

This is the nursing home counterpart to Medicare's Hospital Compare (see first entry in this section.)

## **Health Plans/Medicare**

[National Committee for Quality Assurance Report Card](http://reportcards.ncqa.org) (reportcards.ncqa.org)

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

[Medicare & You](http://www.medicare.gov/medicare-and-you/medicare-and-you.html) (www.medicare.gov/medicare-and-you/medicare-and-you.html, 1-800-med-icare)

This general handbook to Medicare benefits is one of the many health information sources published by the Medicare office that are available in print and in full text on its Web site.

[verywell Health Insurance](http://www.verywell.com/health-insurance-4014713) (www.verywell.com/health-insurance-4014713)

One of the recent spinoffs from *About.com* is this health channel. The linked section is about finding good health plans.

*Consumer Reports* (various)

This venerable consumer publication also offers advice on the purchase of health insurance. The library offers more than one way of accessing it. Its monthly issues and annual buying guides are available in print. Also, you can access it online through our [Web site](http://www.prairietrailslibrary.org) (www.prairietrailslibrary.org): click on the **Research** link on the menu bar, and on the following page, click on the **Ebsco Database Group** link. Then, on the next page, click on the **ConsumerReports.org** link. Under the **Product Reviews** menu, select **Health** and on the submenu select **Health Insurance**. Keep in mind that in order to avail yourself of the library's subscription, you must access the publication through the library site.

[Stickney Township](http://www.townshipofstickney.org/aging_and_disability.html) (www.townshipofstickney.org/aging\_and\_disability.html, 708-636-8850)

The Township's Aging and Disability Resource Center provides free health insurance counseling to residents.