

Medicare Advantage Supplemental Palliative Care Benefits in 2019

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INTRODUCTION

In new guidance issued April 2018, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) introduced important new flexibility for Medicare Advantage (MA) plans, private insurers that cover Medicare benefits on behalf of those beneficiaries who voluntarily enroll in their plan. The new guidance allowed plans to offer supplemental benefits – those not covered in traditional Medicare Parts A and B – to sub-sets of enrollees based on documented need, and specifically noted “home-based palliative care” and “support for caregivers of enrollees” as options for plans.

Plans had only a few months to file for any new benefit offerings under that new guidance, yet despite the shortened timeframe, a significant number did include new supplemental benefits, with 13% including support for caregivers, 2.3% including in-home support services, and 0.9% including palliative care in their benefit package¹.

This analysis looks at the 37 MA plans that included palliative care as a supplemental benefit – additional to existing Part A and Part B benefits – in the 2019 coverage year.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

Data were obtained from three Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) data files:

- Plan Benefits Package 2019
- 2019 Medicare Advantage Landscape Source File
- 2019 Medicare Advantage and Part D Monthly Enrollment by Plan

Data was matched across the three datasets by Contract ID and Plan ID. Each case represents one unique Contract and Plan combination.

Health plans write in supplemental benefit offerings.

Palliative care was coded from the following terms:

- Palliative Care
- Supportive Care
- Home-based Palliative Care

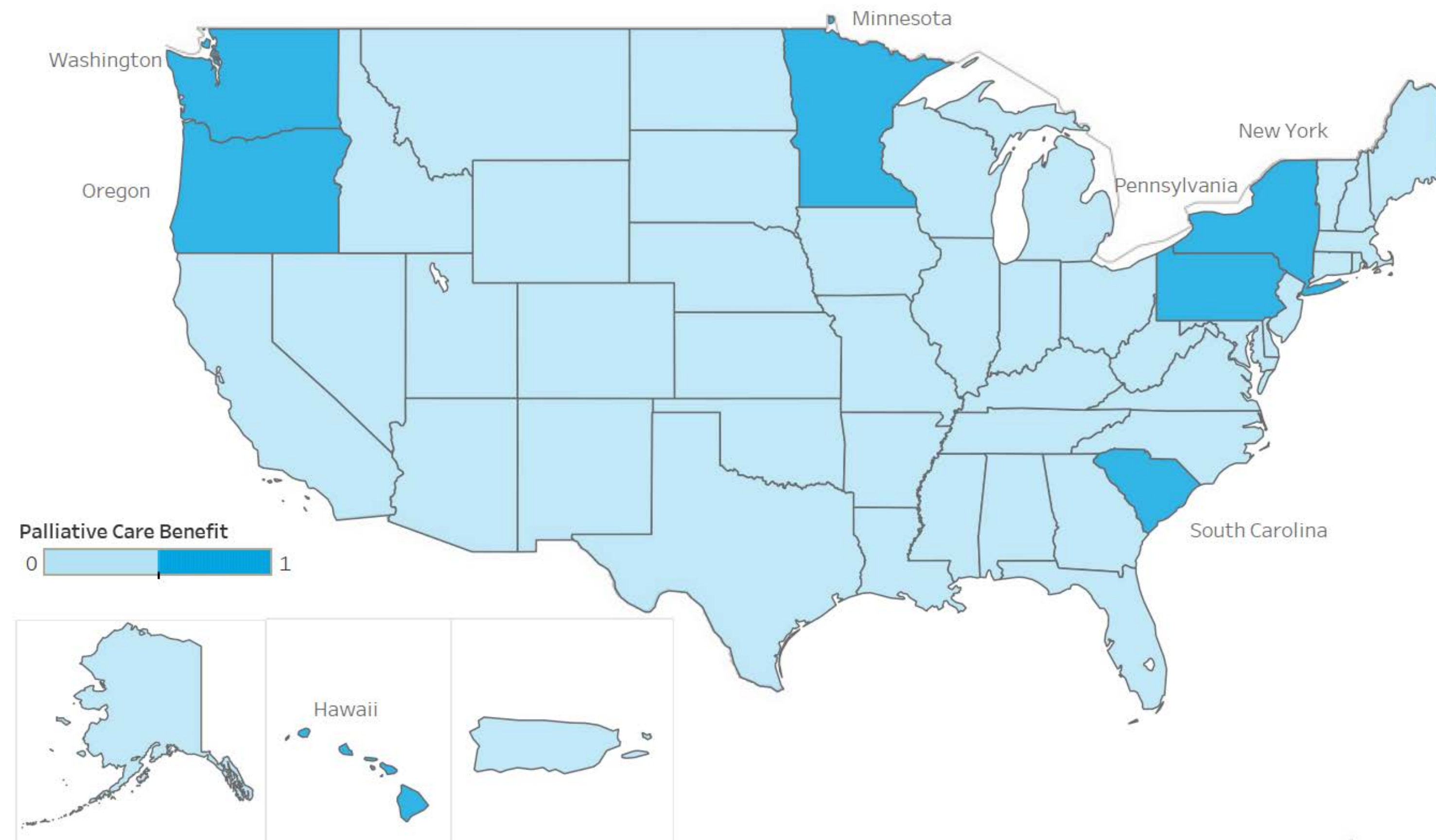
Caregiver support was coded from the following:

- Supports for Caregivers
- Caregiver Services
- Respite Care

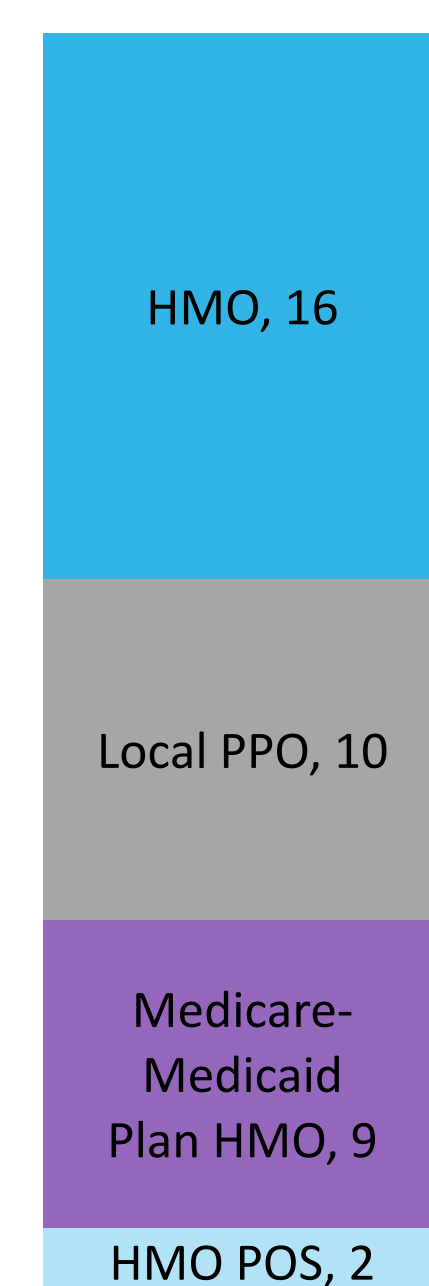
The dataset was limited to plans that were providing palliative care as a supplemental benefit.

RESULTS

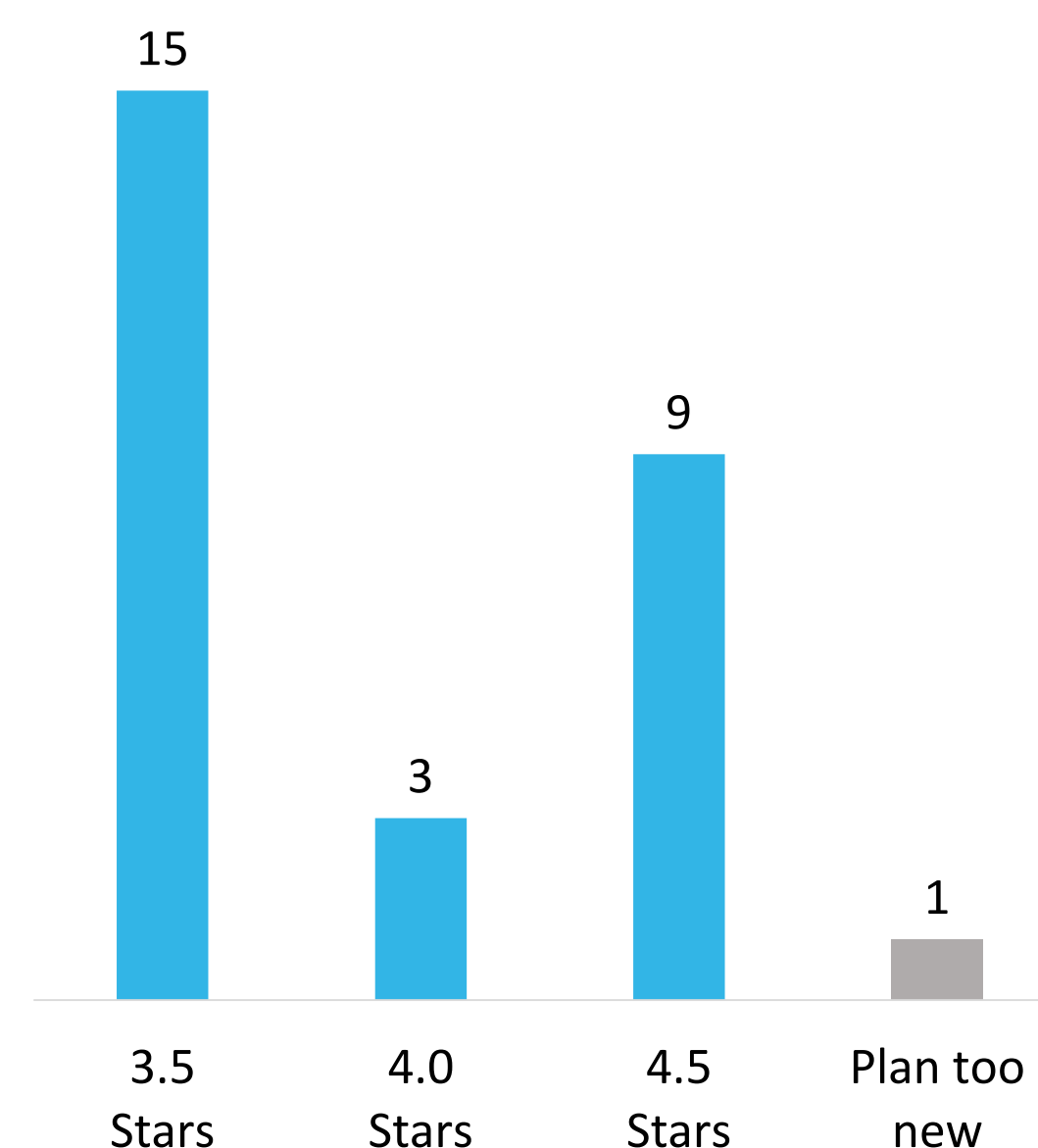
37 health plans include supplemental benefits that cover palliative care services in **7** states



24% of these plans are Fully-Integrated Medicare-Medicaid

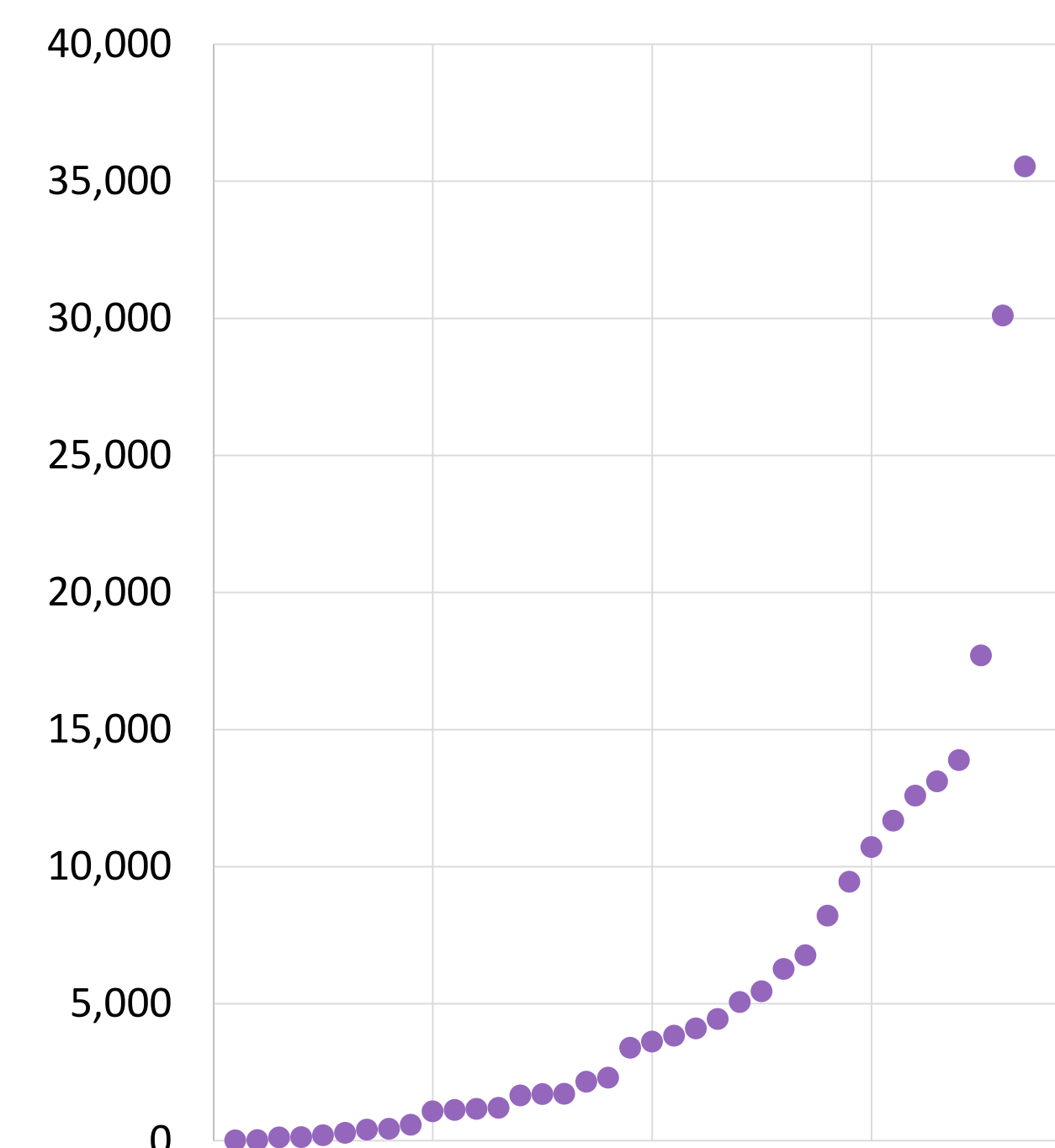


43% received an “above average” Star Rating with 4 stars or greater*

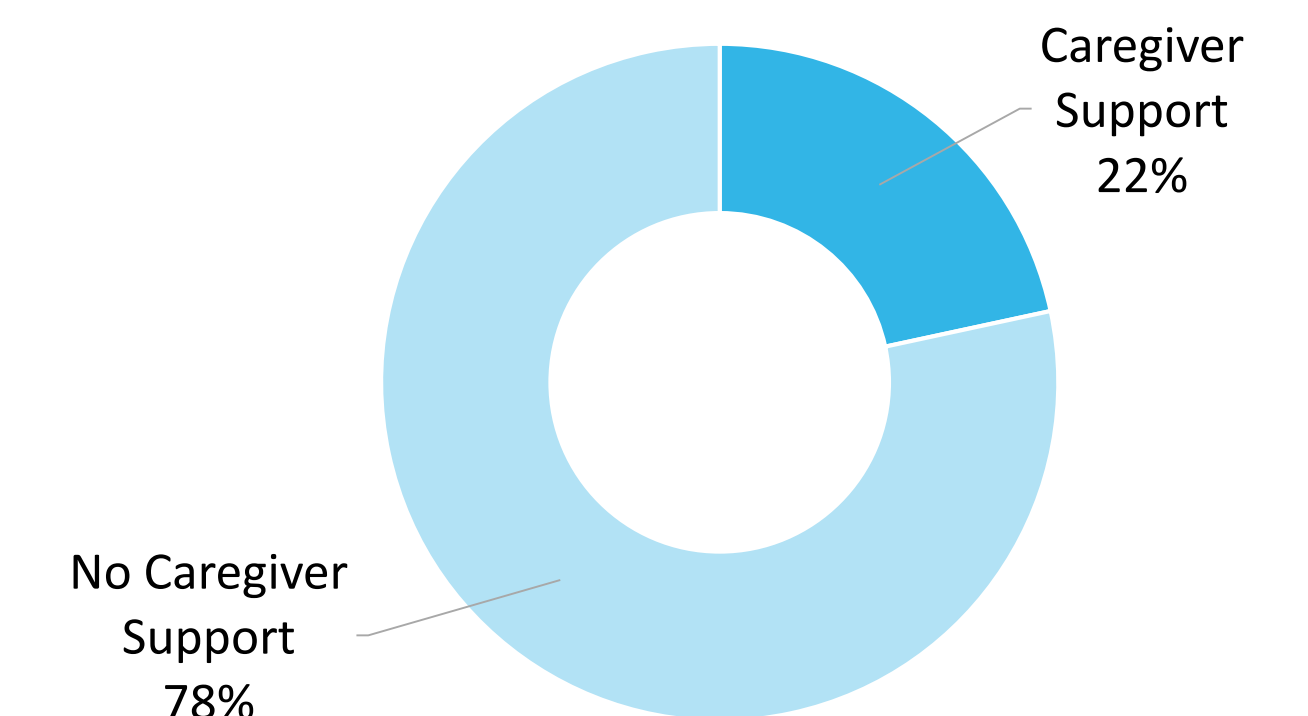


* Star Ratings were missing for the 9 Medicare-Medicaid plans

Collectively, these plans cover **222,219** enrollees



In addition to palliative care, **22%** also include supplemental benefits that cover caregiver support



DISCUSSION

The 2019 coverage year gave insight into the “early adopters” of new supplemental benefits that could be targeted to enrollees based on specific characteristics. These early indications show that plans of all types – across different geographic locations, from very small to fairly large plans, and among typical HMO plans, PPO plans, and fully integrated Medicare-Medicaid plans – can take advantage of both the member and business value in covering palliative care for their enrollees with serious and life-limiting illnesses.

Expectations are that the number of plans filing for new supplemental benefits will increase for the 2020 and 2021 plan years². First, plans will have had the needed time to consider their strategies under the new CMS guidance. Second, and more significantly, with the passage of the CHRONIC ACT under the Balanced Budget Act of 2018, the flexibility to vary supplemental benefits based on needs is now codified in law, even allowing supplemental benefits that are “non-primarily health related,” called Special Supplemental Benefits for the Chronically Ill (“SSBCIs”). SSBCIs can include services such as home modifications and food, and can help meet these basic needs for many living with serious illness.

CAPC will continue to educate MA leaders on the value of palliative care, and the strategies that improve quality-of-life and cost-effectiveness for their enrollees. CAPC will also continue to track the MA filings for palliative care services, monitoring access across states and plan types.

1. JE Sung and Noel-Miller C, “Supplemental Benefits in Medicare Advantage: What’s Changing and What’s Not,” AARP Blog, October 30, 2018

2. J. Silverstein, “Why 2020 Will Launch the Medicare Advantage Boom in Home Care,” Home Health Care News, July 23, 2019