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TOP CRITICAL ACCESS HOSPITAL PRICE TRANSPARENCY SOLUTION 2026

HOSPITAL PRICING SPECIALISTS (HPS)

TRUSTED PARTNER FOR CRITICAL ACCESS HOSPITALS IN PRICE TRANSPARENCY COMPLIANCE



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Price transparency has become one of the most scrutinized and operationally challenging mandates facing U.S. hospitals—particularly Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs), which must meet the same federal requirements as large health systems with only a fraction of the staff and resources. As enforcement intensifies and regulatory expectations expand, the gap between compliance in theory and execution in practice has become increasingly visible.

After an extensive review process that included interviews with CAH executives, revenue cycle leaders, and healthcare revenue cycle management (RCM) vendors—many of whom do not offer price transparency solutions—Healthcare Tech Outlook has selected Hospital Pricing Specialists (HPS) as its 2026 Best Price Transparency Vendor for Critical Access Hospitals.

This designation reflects not marketing claims, but observed performance: repeatable compliance outcomes, defensible methodologies, and a depth of pricing expertise that CAH leaders consistently cited as differentiating in an increasingly crowded vendor landscape.

An Independent Evaluation Grounded in Market Feedback

Healthcare Tech Outlook's evaluation focused on a central question voiced repeatedly by rural hospital leaders: Which vendors actually understand how Critical Access Hospitals operate financially—and can translate federal price transparency rules into something workable and defensible?

Interviews with CAH CFOs and revenue cycle executives revealed a common theme. Many price transparency tools currently on the market were designed for large, urban health systems and later "scaled down" for rural use. This approach often leaves CAHs with tools that technically meet minimum publishing requirements but fail under audit, payer scrutiny, or patient use.

THE 2026 BEST PRICE TRANSPARENCY VENDOR FOR CRITICAL ACCESS HOSPITALS AWARD RECOGNIZES NOT ONLY A TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM, BUT A METHODOLOGY SHAPED BY DECADES OF PRICING EXPERIENCE AND VALIDATED BY HOSPITAL OPERATORS WHO LIVE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF NON-COMPLIANCE.

RCM vendors interviewed during the review process—several of whom explicitly do not offer price transparency solutions—acknowledged that transparency compliance increasingly intersects with contract modeling, claims data, and reimbursement behavior. However, they also noted that most vendors stop short of tying patient estimates to actual payment history, creating exposure for hospitals during audits.

HPS stood out in this context because its approach was repeatedly described as pricing-first, not publishing-first.

A Pricing-Centric Approach to Transparency

Founded on decades of hospital pricing and reimbursement experience, HPS operates on the premise that transparency compliance cannot be separated from how hospitals are actually paid. Rather than relying on chargemaster list prices or generic payer assumptions, HPS builds its estimates using historical claims and remittance data, grounding patient-facing prices in real-world reimbursement behavior.

This methodology resonated with CAH leaders interviewed by Healthcare Tech Outlook, many of whom described prior experiences with tools that technically satisfied CMS formatting rules but lacked defensibility.



Rick Louie, President of HPS, describes the company's philosophy succinctly: "Our view has always been that price transparency is fundamentally a pricing problem, not a website problem. If the underlying numbers aren't defensible, the hospital carries the risk."

Healthcare Tech Outlook's analysis found this pricing-first mindset particularly relevant as CMS expands requirements beyond simple disclosure toward accuracy, completeness, and auditability.

EZCOST: Designed Around CAH Constraints

Much of the evaluation centered on **EZCOST**, HPS's patient price estimator platform. Hospital leaders consistently pointed to two attributes that differentiated the tool: accuracy and usability.

Unlike many estimators that rely on averaged or theoretical prices, EZCOST calculates estimates using payer contract logic and historical EDI 837 and 835 data. This design choice allows hospitals to demonstrate that published estimates reflect how claims are actually adjudicated—an increasingly important distinction under CMS scrutiny.

Equally important for CAHs is usability. Patient access teams interviewed during the review emphasized that tools requiring extensive data entry or multi-screen navigation often go unused. EZCOST's single-screen workflow was frequently cited as a practical advantage that increased patient completion rates without adding operational burden.

Prepared for 2026—and Beyond

Healthcare Tech Outlook also evaluated vendor readiness for the 2026 CMS price transparency enhancements, including requirements tied to payment percentiles derived from remittance data. Many hospitals reported that their existing vendors were still interpreting these rules or planning future development.

By contrast, HPS clients described systems already aligned with these requirements, reflecting the firm's long-standing use of claims and payment data as the foundation of its transparency models.



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This forward alignment was a key factor in the award decision, particularly as CAHs face limited tolerance for vendor transitions and re-implementations.

A Risk Model That Aligns Incentives

One of the more unusual findings during the review was HPS's contractual guarantee: if a hospital using its solution is fined by CMS for non-compliance, HPS assumes financial responsibility for the penalty.

Healthcare Tech Outlook views this guarantee not as a marketing feature, but as a signal of incentive alignment. Few vendors interviewed were willing to assume direct financial risk tied to compliance outcomes. For CAH executives operating with thin margins, this alignment was repeatedly cited as a trust-building factor.

Why HPS Earned the 2026 Distinction

In a market where many solutions emphasize surface-level compliance, Healthcare Tech Outlook's assessment concluded that Hospital Pricing Specialists distinguished itself by addressing the underlying economic reality of rural hospitals. Its solutions reflect how CAHs are paid, how patients interact with estimates, and how regulators evaluate defensibility.

The 2026 Best Price Transparency Vendor for Critical Access Hospitals award recognizes not only a technology platform, but a methodology shaped by decades of pricing experience and validated by hospital operators who live with the consequences of non-compliance.

As price transparency moves from regulatory obligation to operational expectation, Healthcare Tech Outlook anticipates that pricing-grounded approaches like HPS's will increasingly define best practice for rural healthcare providers. **HT**