Hospice criteria for dementia: FAST 7 plus one complication

LCD L33393 indicators for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, the FAST 7 substages, and what to document.

What are the hospice eligibility indicators for dementia?

Hospice eligibility for dementia under the Medicare LCD guidance requires both parts: a functional stage of FAST 7 or beyond, and at least one complicating condition in the past 12 months, such as aspiration pneumonia, upper urinary tract infection, septicemia, multiple stage 3 to 4 pressure ulcers, recurrent fever or inadequate intake.

Part	Indicator	Detail
1. Functional stage	FAST stage 7 or beyond	All of the following are expected: unable to walk without assistance, unable to dress without assistance, unable to bathe without assistance, urinary and fecal incontinence (intermittent or constant), and no consistently meaningful verbal communication (stereotypical phrases only, or speech limited to about six or fewer intelligible words).
2. Complicating condition in the past 12 months (at least one)	Aspiration pneumonia	Date and treatment.
	Pyelonephritis or other upper urinary tract infection	Date and treatment.
	Septicemia	Date and source.
	Pressure ulcers, multiple, stage 3 to 4	Stage, location and course.
	Fever, recurrent after antibiotics	Dates and antibiotics given.
	Inability to maintain sufficient fluid and calorie intake	With 10% weight loss during the previous six months, or serum albumin under 2.5 g/dL.

Read this table together with the general decline indicators and the non-disease-specific baseline (functional status and dependence in activities of daily living) on the eligibility guidelines overview.

FAST stage 7 substages

FAST stage 7 is divided into substages 7a to 7f, from speech limited to about half a dozen intelligible words (7a) to being unable to hold the head up independently (7f).

Substage	Description
7a	Speech limited to about half a dozen intelligible words in an average day or interview.
7b	Speech limited to a single intelligible word in an average day or interview.
7c	Cannot walk without personal assistance.
7d	Cannot sit up without assistance.
7e	Loss of the ability to smile.
7f	Cannot hold the head up independently.

FAST is ordinal and was validated in Alzheimer's disease. Stages should be reached in sequence. In vascular, Lewy body and mixed dementias, patients often skip stages, so FAST is less reliable and comorbidities and complications carry more of the prognostic weight. For how the LCD treats substages, see the LCD.

What documentation supports hospice eligibility in dementia?

Documentation that supports hospice eligibility in dementia includes the items below. Send or note what you have. None of these is required to make a referral.

- The type of dementia, approximate onset, and the FAST stage with the specific findings behind it.
- Weights over the past six to twelve months, with percent change, and current intake described in portions.
- Swallowing problems: coughing with meals, pocketing food, texture changes, speech-language pathology findings.
- Infections, hospitalizations and emergency visits in the past 12 months, with dates.
- Skin condition and any pressure injuries.
- Whether the family has decided for or against a feeding tube, hospital transfer and antibiotics.
- PPS or KPS score if available.