

December 19, 2024

Mandatory Action Required Removal of Amazon Linux 2 & Windows Server 2016

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requires that when an operating system, software, or application is nearing the End of Life (EOL) based on vendor notifications or postings, the risk must be mitigated by either upgrading, retiring, or stopping the use of an unsupported operating system, software, or application.

Amazon Linux 2 – Updated Timeline

Amazon Linux 2 (AL2) and AL2 with Elastic Kubernetes Service (EKS) will reach the end of life (EOL) in June 2026. If you are running AL2 or AL2 with EKS in the QualityNet environment, you are asked to **migrate** to a new operating system, such as Amazon Linux 2023 (AL2023), AL2023 with EKS, or Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL), **before December 31, 2025**.

We strongly encourage all users to take the necessary steps to migrate their applications in a timely manner to avoid any potential disruptions. AL2 must be fully removed from QualityNet. This requires Application Development Organizations (ADOs) to stop usage and remove "stopped" instances in their AWS accounts. A "stopped" instance must be terminated to be fully removed from the environment.

The Cloud Operations and Maintenance (CCOM) team released the AL2023 Amazon Machine Image (AMI) in July 2024 and the EKS with AL2023 AMI in August 2024.

Windows Server 2016

Windows Server 2016 will reach the end of life (EOL) in January 2027. If you are running Windows Server 2016 in the QualityNet environment, you are asked to plan a strategy to **migrate** to the new Windows Server 2022, **before December 31, 2025**.

We strongly encourage all users to take the necessary steps to migrate their applications in a timely manner to avoid any potential disruptions. Windows Server 2016 must be fully removed from QualityNet by the defined date. This requires Application Development Organizations (ADOs) to stop usage and remove "stopped" instances in their AWS accounts. A "stopped" instance must be terminated to be fully removed from the environment.

The CCOM Cloud team released the Windows Server 2022 AMI in June 2024.

If Timeline Cannot Be Met

If the timeline for AL2 cannot be met, Business and System Owners must submit a formal Risk-Based Decision (RBD) for approval by the CMS Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) and Chief Information Officer (CIO). The RBD should include:

- A comparison of options for sustaining, upgrading, or replacing unsupported software.
- An explanation of compensating controls implemented to mitigate the risk associated with unsupported software.
- Confirmation of planned/allocated funding.
- A scheduled date for removing, retiring, or upgrading of unsupported software or applications.

If an RBD is rejected, all instances of AL2 must be removed from the network immediately or by the EOL date. Any new vulnerabilities that may emerge can lead to the rejection of previously approved risk acceptances or RBDs in accordance with Binding Operational Directive (BOD) 19-02.

Support / Questions

Please ensure your system is in full compliance with these guidelines to uphold the security posture and policies set forth within HHS. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your Information System Security Officer (ISSO) for additional information and guidance.

If you need additional information, please work with your assigned CMS Information System Security Officer (ISSO): [List here](#) , the HIDS Security Analyst team, or reach out on QualityNet Slack: [#qnet-security-community](#).

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