

Quality Improvement Basics

A Collection of Helpful Resources for Rural Health Care Organizations

If you are new to health care quality improvement, you might feel overwhelmed navigating and making sense of all of the learning resources, national quality improvement (QI) entities, and reporting programs. This collection points new quality health care professionals to the most helpful introductory resources and provides awareness of the more prominent health care quality organizations, programs, and terms.

Basic Health Care Quality Improvement

Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) – the independent nonprofit organization is a leading innovator, convener, partner, and driver of results in health and health care improvement worldwide.

Helpful resources from IHI that provide basic QI education:

- [How to Improve](#) – QI overview using the Model for Improvement
- [Dr. Mike Evans Video: An Illustrated Look at Quality Improvement in Health Care](#) (8 minutes)
- [The Science of Improvement on a Whiteboard!](#) – series of videos on QI and QI tools, such as run charts, flow charts, and PDSA cycles (3-10 minutes each)
- [An Introduction to the Model for Improvement](#) (56 minutes)
- [Building Skills in Data Collection and Understanding Variation](#) (49 minutes)
- [Using Run and Control Charts to Understand Variation](#) (55 minutes)
- [IHI Open School](#) – training and tools in an online, educational community to help you and your team deliver excellent, safe care. Paid subscriptions are offered for professionals and groups with discounts available for rural health care organizations

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) – produces evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable, and to work within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and with other partners to make sure that the evidence is understood and used.

AHRQ provides a variety of health care quality tools and resources including measurement strategies, patient safety and teamwork programs, and quality facilitation assistance.

- [AHRQ – Quality Indicators](#) – nationally recognized measures of health care quality that use administrative, or claims data. They include Patient Safety Indicators (PSIs), Prevention Quality Indicators (PQIs), Inpatient Quality Indicators (IQIs), and Pediatric Quality Indicators (PDIs).
- [Toolkit for Using the AHRQ Quality Indicators](#) – toolkit provides direction, tools and resources to drive improvement based on AHRQ Quality Indicators.
- [Comprehensive Unit-based Safety Program \(CUSP\)](#) – CUSP toolkit includes training tools to make care safer by improving the foundation of how physicians, nurses, and other clinical team members work together. It builds the capacity to address safety issues by combining clinical best practices and the science of safety.

- [TeamSTEPPS](#) – evidence-based set of teamwork tools, aimed at optimizing patient outcomes by improving communication and teamwork skills among health care professionals.
- [Practice Facilitation Handbook](#) – assists in training new practice facilitators as they begin to develop the knowledge and skills needed to support meaningful improvement in primary care practices.

[Health Resources and Service Administration \(HRSA\) Quality Improvement](#) – introduction to QI concepts and key topics for developing or improving a QI program within an organization. HRSA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is the primary federal agency for improving access to health care services for people who are uninsured, isolated or medically vulnerable.

[National Quality Forum \(NQF\)](#) – considered the gold standard for health care measurement in U.S. NQF is a private sector standard-setting organization whose efforts center on the evaluation and endorsement of standardized performance measurement.

[Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology \(ONC\)](#) - the principal federal entity charged with coordination of nationwide efforts to implement and use the most advanced health information technology and the electronic exchange of health information.

- [Quality and Patient Safety Health IT Playbook](#) includes Safety Assurance Factors for EHR Resilience (SAFER) guides, which identify recommended practices to optimize the safety and safe use of electronic health record (EHR) systems, and a series of ten 90-minute [webinars](#) focusing on health IT safety. Webinar topics include medication management, electronic ordering, documentation and usability.

Quality Improvement Reporting

Clinic/Provider Quality Reporting Programs

[Quality Payment Program \(QPP\)](#) – part of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act of 2015 (MACRA), the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) QPP rewards providers for the delivery of high-quality patient care through two avenues:

- [Merit-based Incentive Payment System \(MIPS\)](#) – MIPS consolidates components of three existing programs, Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS), Physician Value-based Payment Modifier (VM), and Medicare Electronic Health Record Incentive Program for Eligible Professionals, and continues the focus on quality, cost, and use of certified EHR technology (CEHRT) in a cohesive program that avoids redundancies.
- [Alternative Payment Models \(APMs\)](#) – payment approaches, developed in partnership with the clinician community, that provide added incentives to deliver high-quality and cost-efficient care.

Current programs being incorporated into the Quality Payment Program, starting in 2017:

- [Physician Quality Reporting System \(PQRS\)](#) – quality reporting program that encourages individual eligible professionals (EP) and group practices to report information on the quality of care to Medicare.
- [CMS Electronic Health Record \(EHR\) Incentive Programs](#) – established to encourage eligible professionals and eligible hospitals to adopt, implement, upgrade, and demonstrate meaningful use of certified EHR technology. For clinicians, this program is being incorporated into QPP

[Uniform Data System \(UDS\)](#) – HRSA Health Center Program grantees and look-alikes report on their performance using the measures defined in the UDS. HRSA offers manuals, webinars, trainings online and at various state/regional/national meetings, and other technical assistance resources to assist health centers in collecting and submitting their data.

Hospital Quality Reporting Programs

[CMS Inpatient Quality Reporting \(IQR\)](#) – quality data reporting program for inpatient hospital services. Under this program, hospitals report data using standardized measures of care to receive the full update to their Inpatient Prospective Payment System (IPPS) payment rate.

[CMS Outpatient Quality Reporting \(OQR\)](#) – quality data reporting program for outpatient hospital services. Under this program, hospitals report data using standardized measures of care to receive the full update to their Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS) payment rate.

[CMS Electronic Health Record \(EHR\) Incentive Programs](#) – established to encourage eligible professionals and eligible hospitals to adopt, implement, upgrade, and demonstrate meaningful use of certified EHR technology. It will continue to exist as a stand-alone program for eligible hospitals. CMS has been working on aligning measures with the IQR program.

[Medicare Beneficiary Quality Improvement Program \(MBQIP\)](#) – QI activity under the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) grant program of [HRSA FORHP](#). State Flex programs work to improve the quality of care provided in critical access hospitals (CAHs), by increasing quality data reporting by CAHs and supporting quality improvement activities based on the data. The resources linked from the MBQIP home page provide an overview of the goals, expectations and measures for MBQIP as well as resources for reporting and quality improvement initiatives.

Other

[Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set \(HEDIS\)](#) – tool used by more than 90 percent of America's health plans to measure performance on important dimensions of care and service. HEDIS consists of 81 measures across 5 domains of care. Health plans often tie quality improvement efforts and/or provider incentives to improvement on HEDIS measures.

State or Grant Required Quality Reporting: individual states or grant funding sources may require participation in quality reporting programs.

Terms, Programs, and Organizations

Lean Health: Lean thinking begins with driving out waste so that all work adds value and serves the customer's needs. Identifying value-added and non-value-added steps in every process is the beginning of the journey toward lean operations. [IHI: Going Lean in Health Care](#)

Six Sigma – method that provides organizations tools to improve the capability of their business processes. This increase in performance and decrease in process variation leads to defect reduction and improvement in profits, employee morale, and quality of products or services. [American Society for Quality \(ASQ\): Six Sigma Overview](#)

[Lean Six Sigma](#) – fact-based, data-driven philosophy of improvement that values defect prevention over defect detection. It drives customer satisfaction and bottom-line results by reducing variation, waste, and cycle time, while promoting the use of work standardization and flow, thereby creating a competitive advantage. It applies anywhere variation and waste exist, and every employee should be involved. [ASQ: Six Sigma Definition - What is Lean Six Sigma?](#)

[Hospital Improvement Innovation Network \(HIIN\)](#) – since 2016, engages hospital, provider and broader care-giver communities to quickly implement well-tested and measured best practices to improve the quality of care in the Medicare program through the [Partnership for Patients](#).

Medicare Quality Improvement Organizations (QIO) – a group of health quality experts, clinicians, and consumers organized to improve the quality of care delivered to people with Medicare. Two types of QIOs work under the direction of CMS in support of the QIO Program.

- Quality Innovation Network (QIN)-QIOs bring Medicare beneficiaries, providers, and communities together in data-driven initiatives that increase patient safety, make communities healthier, better coordinate post-hospital care, and improve clinical quality.
- Beneficiary and Family Centered Care (BFCC)-QIOs help Medicare beneficiaries exercise their right to high-quality health care.

Transforming Clinical Practice Initiative (TCPI) – helps clinicians achieve large-scale health transformation. The initiative is one part of a strategy advanced by the Affordable Care Act to strengthen the quality of patient care and spend health care dollars more wisely.

Accreditation Organizations: The Social Security Act permits providers and suppliers accredited by an approved national accreditation organization (AO) to be exempt from routine surveys by State survey agencies to determine compliance with Medicare conditions. Accreditation by an AO is voluntary and is not required for Medicare certification or participation in the Medicare Program. For example, some hospitals seek accreditation from The Joint Commission rather than participating in the State survey agency process.

- [CMS Information on Accreditation](#)
- [CMS-Approved Accrediting Organizations](#)

Quality Certification Individual Professional Programs

- [Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality](#)
- [Practice Facilitation Certificate Program](#)

Rural Health Care Organizations

Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) – Part of HRSA, FORHP has responsibility for analyzing the possible effects of policy on the 57 million residents of rural communities and provides grant funding at the state and local levels to improve access, quality and financing for rural health care. Grant funding includes the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Grant (Flex), the Small Rural Hospital Improvement Program (SHIP), and others.

National Center for Rural Health Works - provides tools and templates by which community residents can evaluate their health systems.

National Rural Health Association (NRHA) – national nonprofit membership organization with more than 20,000 members. The association’s mission is to provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research.

National Rural Health Resource Center (The Center) – provides technical assistance, information, tools and resources for the improvement of rural health care. It serves as a national rural health knowledge center and strives to build state and local capacity.

Rural Health Information Hub (RHI Hub) – formerly the Rural Assistance Center, is funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy to be a national clearinghouse on rural health issues.

- [Rural Community Health Gateway](#) – evidence-based toolkits include literature reviews and provide resources to implement effective community health programs on topics such as: care coordination, quality improvement, community health workers, mental health and substance abuse, obesity prevention, etc. [Rural Health Models and Innovations Hub](#) provides examples of evidence-based programs and approaches shown to be effective, as well as new and emerging ideas.

[Rural Health Research Gateway](#) - an online library of research and expertise for all 10 federally-funded Rural Health Research Centers and Policy Analysis Initiatives.

[Rural Health Value](#) – assists rural communities and providers to achieve a high performance health system by providing tools and resources appropriate for varying levels of change-readiness. Its website provides tools and resources designed to facilitate transitions to a high performance rural health system.

[Rural Policy Research Institute \(RUPRI\)](#) – provides unbiased analysis and information on the challenges, needs, and opportunities facing rural America. It aims to spur public dialogue and help policymakers understand the rural impacts of public policies and programs.

Recommended Books

- The improvement guide: a practical approach to enhancing organizational performance. Langley, G. J., Moen, R., Nolan, K. M., Nolan, T. W., Norman, C. L., & Provost, L. P. John Wiley & Sons. (2009)
- Our iceberg is melting: Changing and succeeding under any conditions. Kotter, J. P., & Rathgeber, H. Macmillan. (2006)
- Switch: How to change when change is hard. Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010)
- Who moved my cheese. Johnson, S. Random House. (2015)