



Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality  
Advancing Excellence in Health Care

Through implementation of the National Quality Strategy, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality is leading the integration of quality improvement efforts across the Federal Government, States, and the private sector. At the Federal level, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality guides other U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Agencies in developing Agency-Specific Plans for the National Quality Strategy, coleads a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services-wide Measurement Policy Council to harmonize measures across the Department, develops an Annual Progress Report to Congress on the Strategy's implementation, and leads an Interagency Working Group on Health Care Quality to ensure all relevant Federal Agencies are playing a role in implementing the National Quality Strategy. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality also coordinates with States that have or are seeking to implement the National Quality Strategy framework into their own statewide quality plans. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality plays a role in private-sector engagement through its oversight of the Working for Quality Web site and related materials and activities, which includes identifying public- and private-sector programs that are successfully implementing the National Quality Strategy's priorities and featuring them on the Working for Quality Web site as "Priorities in Action." This engagement also includes holding Webinars with participants from across the private sector to introduce the National Quality Strategy and describe how private-sector partners can help support its implementation. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality leaders also regularly speak about the National Quality Strategy at conferences and events, using external speaking engagements as an opportunity to introduce the Strategy to new stakeholders.



Beyond leading National Quality Strategy implementation efforts for Federal, State, and private-sector stakeholders, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality also implements the National Quality Strategy within its own Agency programs and priorities. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's newly revised mission is to produce evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and more affordable, and to work with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other partners to make sure that the evidence is understood and used. This mission guides new Agency priorities, which directly align to the National Quality Strategy priorities, and will inform how the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality prioritizes its programmatic efforts in the coming years.

To improve health care quality, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality focuses on accelerating the implementation of Patient-Centered Outcomes Research, with a focus on improving performance on ABCS (aspirin use among people with heart disease, blood pressure control, high blood cholesterol control, and smoking cessation advice and support). From a programmatic perspective, this means the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality improves health care quality and patient health outcomes by investing Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Trust Fund dollars in supporting small- and medium-sized primary care practices in two areas: 1)

improving performance on of cardiovascular care and 2) improving primary care practices' capacity to incorporate new Patient-Centered Outcomes Research findings in the delivery of care.

To make health care safer, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality translates the results of patient safety research into practical tools for providers. This includes the implementation of a multifaceted initiative focused on preventing healthcare-associated infections (HAIs), accelerating patient safety improvement in hospitals, reducing harm associated with obstetrical care, supporting medical liability reform, and accelerating patient safety improvements in nursing homes. In collaboration with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality will lead U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' efforts to evaluate the effects of coverage expansions in Medicaid and the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Finally, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality focuses on improving health care affordability, efficiency, and cost transparency, including workforce issues. This includes exploring measures that can be used with all-payer claims databases for price and quality transparency efforts, and developing and disseminating evidence and tools to measure and enhance the efficiency of health systems, including gaining a better understanding of the contributions of variations in the workforce practitioners to efficiency and quality.

In the past year, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality laid the groundwork for the strategies, action steps, and performance measures it has established to support National Quality Strategy implementation in the upcoming year. Examples of these foundational programs include the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's successful efforts to implement proven methods to reduce HAIs in hospitals; existing patient safety tools to reduce hospital-acquired conditions; and the TeamSTEPPS® program, designed for health care professionals to improve communication and teamwork skills. Many of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's successes in the past year relate to efforts to make health care safer. For example, the Agency's nationwide project employing the Comprehensive Unit-based Safety Program (CUSP) reduced central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSI) by 41 percent and reduced catheter-associated urinary tract infection (CAUTI) rates by 16 percent in approximately 300 hospital units. A recent Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality-supported project achieved a 50 percent reduction in the incidence of pressure ulcers and avoided 2.6 pressure ulcers per 100 nursing home residents each month. In addition, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's efforts to support medical liability reform through a recent pilot demonstration grant achieved successful results, including:

- An 80 percent decrease in self-insured fund set-aside (\$40 million to \$8 million)
- A 40 percent decline in the number of malpractice claims
- An 80 percent reduction in time to settle cases
- A 20 percent reduction in services associated with defensive medicine

In the upcoming year, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality plans to build upon its previous successes to implement the strategies, action steps, and performance measures identified to support National Quality Strategy implementation. For example, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality plans to expand the Comprehensive Unit-based Safety Program

for catheter-associated urinary tract infections project to more hospital units, allowing the Agency to reach more providers and improve health care safety for more patients. In addition, the Agency plans to award competitive 3-year grants to up to eight regional collaboratives to disseminate Patient-Centered Outcomes Research evidence directly to primary care practices and support them in implementing clinical and organizational evidence in practice. The grantees will improve patient health through focusing on improving implementation of the Million Hearts® ABCS. The collaboratives will work directly with primary care practices, using evidence-based quality improvement techniques such as practice assessment, benchmarking and feedback, expert consultation, local peer learning, clinical decision support, and practice facilitation (a type of organizational coaching). A second grant will establish an external evaluation to study improvements in the delivery of the ABCS. The evaluation will also examine whether and how quality improvement techniques allow for rapid and sustainable dissemination and implementation of Patient-Centered Outcomes Research evidence, including building capacity for evidence use by primary care practices.

To help improve health care affordability, as announced in Special Emphasis Notice (NOT-HS-14-005), the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has been seeking to develop and disseminate evidence and tools to measure and enhance the efficiency of health systems—the capacity to produce better quality and outcomes while avoiding overutilization. This includes analyzing variations in quality and resource use, and identifying the factors that differentiate higher-performing from lower-performing systems, with special emphasis on understanding the policy-relevant effects of different workforce configurations, organizational strategies, and compensation methods. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality also is working with Stanford University and the National Association of Health Data Organizations to explore and advance the use of all-payer claims databases for transparency efforts by developing an inventory of price, utilization, quality, and episode-of-care measures.

In the upcoming year, ARHQ will also be advancing heart health in primary care through EvidenceNOW. This grant initiative to transform health care delivery will build critical infrastructure to help smaller primary care practices, which often do not have internal resources for quality improvement, apply the latest medical research in the care they provide. Aligned with broad U.S. Department of Health and Human Services efforts for Better Care, Smarter Spending, and Healthier People and Million Hearts®, this initiative will focus on helping thousands of primary care practices use the latest evidence to improve the heart health of millions of Americans.

Collectively, these efforts will allow the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to not only achieve the strategies, action steps, and performance measures it has identified for supporting National Quality Strategy implementation in the upcoming year but also help contribute to achieving the overall National Quality Strategy aims and priorities. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality serves as an example for how all stakeholders, including Federal Agencies and external organizations, can incorporate the National Quality Strategy priorities into their organizations' mission statements, priorities, and programmatic focus areas. As the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality leads these internal and external efforts to support National Quality Strategy implementation, it will continue to play a strong role in helping the Nation achieve the three-part aim of better care, healthy people/healthy communities, and affordable care.