

The National Quality Strategy is a national effort to align public- and private-sector stakeholders to achieve better health and health care for all Americans.

About the National Quality Strategy

The National Quality Strategy (NQS) was first published in March 2011 as the **National Strategy for Quality Improvement in Health Care**, and is led by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Mandated by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the NQS was developed through a transparent and collaborative process with input from a range of stakeholders. More than 300 groups, organizations, and individuals, representing all sectors of the health care industry and the general public, provided comments. Based on this input, the NQS established a set of **three overarching aims** that builds on the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple Aim[®], supported by **six priorities** that address the most common health concerns that Americans face. Stakeholders can use the **nine levers** to align their core business or organizational functions with the NQS to drive improvement on the aims and priorities.

How the National Quality Strategy Works

Improving health and health care quality can occur only if all sectors—individuals, family members, payers, providers, employers, and communities—make it their mission. Members of the health care community can align to the NQS by doing the following:

- *Adopt the three aims to provide* better, more affordable care for the individual and the community.
- *Focus on the six priorities to guide efforts* to improve health and health care quality.
- *Use one or more of the nine levers to identify* core business functions, resources, and/or actions that may serve as means for achieving improved health and health care quality.

Achieving Aims

The NQS pursues three broad aims. These aims will be used to guide and assess local, State, and national efforts to improve health and the quality of health care.

- **Better Care:** Improve the overall quality by making health care more patient-centered, reliable, accessible, and safe
- **Healthy People/Healthy Communities:** Improve the health of the U.S. population by supporting proven interventions to address behavioral, social, and environmental determinants of health in addition to delivering higher-quality care
- **Affordable Care:** Reduce the cost of quality health care for individuals, families, employers, and government

Setting Priorities

To advance these aims, the NQS focuses on six priorities:

- Making care safer by reducing harm caused in the delivery of care
- Ensuring that each person and family is engaged as partners in their care



- Promoting effective communication and coordination of care
- Promoting the most effective prevention and treatment practices for the leading causes of mortality, starting with cardiovascular disease
- Working with communities to promote wide use of best practices to enable healthy living
- Making quality care more affordable for individuals, families, employers, and governments by developing and spreading new health care delivery models

Using Levers

The nine NQS levers below represent core business functions, resources, and/or actions that stakeholders can use to align to the Strategy. In many cases, stakeholders may already be using these levers but haven't connected these activities to NQS alignment.

- **Measurement and Feedback:** Provide performance feedback to plans and providers to improve care
- **Public Reporting:** Compare treatment results, costs, and patient experience for consumers
- **Learning and Technical Assistance:** Foster learning environments that offer training, resources, tools, and guidance to help organizations achieve quality improvement goals
- **Certification, Accreditation, and Regulation:** Adopt or adhere to approaches to meet safety and quality standards
- **Consumer Incentives and Benefit Designs:** Help consumers adopt healthy behaviors and make informed decisions
- **Payment:** Reward and incentivize providers to deliver high-quality, patient-centered care
- **Health Information Technology:** Improve communication, transparency, and efficiency for better coordinated health and health care
- **Innovation and Diffusion:** Foster innovation in health care quality improvement and facilitate rapid adoption within and across organizations and communities
- **Workforce Development:** Investing in people to prepare the next generation of health care professionals and support lifelong learning for providers

Measure Alignment

The NQS also addresses the proliferation of clinical quality measures currently used in national programs through the work of the HHS Measurement Policy Council (MPC). The MPC began convening in early 2012 to begin the work of aligning measures across HHS with the goal of establishing core sets of measures that are meaningful to different groups of stakeholders. Composed of senior-level representatives from across HHS, the MPC also focuses on new measure development, implementation, and policy so measures that have yet to be created will be aligned as well. For a list of topics and core measure sets, visit the Working for Quality site at www.ahrq.gov/workingforquality.

What You Can Do

The NQS supports the sharing of best practices in health and health care quality improvement at the national, State, and local level and will provide opportunities for the entire Nation to benefit from such collaboration. Learn more by visiting www.ahrq.gov/workingforquality and downloading the Stakeholder Toolkit, or tell us about your efforts by submitting comments to NQStrategy@ahrq.hhs.gov.