

QIO Program: Improving Health for Populations and Communities



Better Primary Prevention and Diagnosis

Electronic health records (EHRs) give physicians a powerful tool for preventing errors, measuring performance, and sharing information with patients and other providers. As more practitioners adopt EHRs and make them part of the patient care process, they also are relying on them to coordinate individual care and manage population health.

The Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) Program is an ally in this effort. From August 2011 through July 2014, physician practices are encouraged to take advantage of QIO assistance with clinical data reporting and to join in local improvement initiatives that leverage EHR functionality to increase rates of preventive services and decrease cardiac risk factors.

A Major Force for Improvement

QIOs in every state and territory, united in a network administered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), have the flexibility to respond to local needs. At the same time, they offer providers the opportunity to contribute to broader health quality goals, such as those set by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' National Quality Strategy and its Action Plan for Reducing Health Care-Associated Infections.

Current QIO Program initiatives are aligned with other major health quality improvement programs and can help physician practices improve their ability to report clinical quality data from their EHR systems and prepare for value-based payment by Medicare and other insurers.

New Ways to Work Together

The latest in improvement science, including new models for accelerating and spreading change, has shaped the QIO Program's approach. This means providers have more and different ways to be a part of QIO initiatives. QIOs are functioning differently, too. Rather than limiting their role to technical assistance, they are convening statewide learning and action networks (LANs) that recognize everyone has knowledge that can contribute to better care. By participating in a LAN, health care providers can harness the power of a 24/7 community for addressing common challenges, connect with a peer facility for mentoring, and be the first to know about improvement breakthroughs—and how they can replicate them in their own facility or practice.

Harnessing Health IT for Better Care

Current QIO Program initiatives for improving population and community health through effective use of health information technology include:

Increasing rates of preventive screenings. Effective use of health information technology increases the capacity of primary care physicians to deliver preventive services. Building on the success of their previous EHR initiatives, QIOs are working with primary care practices that want to take full advantage of their EHR's functionality for supporting care coordination to increase rates of screening mammograms, colorectal screenings, and influenza and



The QIO Program is an integral part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Quality Strategy and is the largest federal program dedicated to improving health quality at the community level. As a major force and trustworthy partner for the continual improvement of health and health care for all Americans, QIOs work with patients, providers and practitioners across organizational, cultural and geographic boundaries to spread rapid, large-scale change. The work that QIOs perform spans every setting in which health care is delivered, even the critical transitions between those settings. The Program focuses on three aims: better patient care, better individual and population health, and lower health care costs through improvement.

Continued

Quality Improvement Organization Program

www.cms.hhs.gov/qualityimprovementorgs

OCSQBox@cms.hhs.gov

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pneumonia vaccinations. Participating practices can increase the number of patients for whom they have complete preventive care data, identify patients who need preventive care, measure and improve preventive care performance, and report data to CMS.

Reducing cardiac risk factors. The QIO Program is a partner in “Million Hearts,” a joint initiative of CMS, the American Heart Association, and other national health care stakeholders that aims to reduce cardiac risk factors that include hypertension, smoking and high cholesterol and increase heart-healthy behaviors, such as aspirin for those who need it. Through their QIO, local physicians and patients can link to resources for care coordination and patient self-management. QIOs also will support practices in using their EHRs to coordinate care and measure improvement in the health of patients who are most at risk for a heart attack.

Supporting more and better clinical quality data. Until recently, physician practices that wanted to participate in the CMS Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS) had to submit claims or registry data. Now practices can report these data directly from their EHR systems. Local QIOs are providing technical assistance to accurately capture the required data elements and extract them for reporting. This qualifies practices for incentive payments that add to their usual annual Medicare reimbursement amounts. It also generates information for CMS’ Physician Compare website, which will help consumers use information about quality to select a health care provider.

Connecting EHRs to quality improvement. QIOs are coordinating with health IT regional extension centers (RECs) in their state or territory to offer improvement expertise to practices that have implemented an EHR but not yet attained meaningful use. This may include, for example, offering assistance in interpreting clinical performance data and using it to drive and measure change. QIOs also are encouraging participation in CMS’ EHR incentive programs.

Learn More and Become Involved

The QIO Program invites all providers, community stakeholders, beneficiaries and caregivers to become partners in its new improvement initiatives. To express an interest, contact your local QIO. A directory is available online at www.cms.gov/qualityimprovementorgs.