

Frequently Asked Questions about Quality Improvement Organizations

What Are Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs)?

QIOs are a nationwide community-based corps of experts dedicated to making health care safer and more effective in every state.

QIOs are independent, mostly non-profit health care organizations that employ physicians from a wide range of specialties who have expertise in quality improvement techniques. They also employ statisticians and epidemiologists, health information technology experts, nurses, communications professionals, pharmacists, and other health care specialists who serve as a resource for local health care professionals and consumers.

The main goal of QIOs is to accelerate the diffusion of evidence-based medicine into everyday clinical practice – in essence, to work with health care professionals in the community to ensure that patients get the best, most efficient, and safest care.

What Do QIOs Do?

QIOs save lives and reduce suffering in communities across the country. They do this by working hand-in-hand with doctors and hospitals to improve patient safety and deliver better care system-wide.

- QIOs work with health care professionals every day to identify ways to deliver safer, more effective care—and they conduct training programs to help doctors and nurses adopt best practices.
- QIOs help physicians in smaller practices adopt and use electronic health records to improve care and reduce errors.
- They target improvements in many specific areas, such as reducing surgical site infections, reducing unnecessary hospitalizations for home health patients, managing pain for nursing home residents, and improving treatment for heart attack patients.
- QIOs also respond to problems brought to them by individual patients. They refer all valid complaints about poor quality to the appropriate authorities.

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How Are QIOs Making a Difference?

They are making a difference by saving lives and helping to improve care for millions of Americans. For example, QIOs are:

- Increasing the use of life-saving drugs for heart attack patients.
- Making surgery safer by reducing infection rates.
- Getting needed antibiotics more quickly to pneumonia patients, cutting their hospital stays in half.
- Extending the lives of patients with congestive heart failure.
- Fighting breast cancer by increasing the use of screening mammograms.
- Improving nursing home care by ensuring proper pain management, limiting use of physical restraints, and helping reduce staff turnover.

Why Should the Nation Invest in QIOs?

QIOs represent the largest national on-the-ground network of experts dedicated to improving health care quality and patient safety. They are a unique resource, with expertise across a broad range of clinical areas and treatment settings. QIOs bring about improvements that save lives and reduce suffering not only for Medicare beneficiaries, but for all patients. Current QIO funding comes to less than one tenth of one percent of Medicare spending. That is money well spent. In a nation where patients receive appropriate medical care only 50 percent of the time, Medicare's investment in improving health care quality is sorely needed.

The American Health Quality Association represents the national network of Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) that work to encourage the spread of best clinical practices and improve systems of care delivery.

How Are QIOs Accountable to the Public?

QIOs are private organizations that work under contract to Medicare. They are committed to a code of conduct and openness about their work endorsed by many of the nation's most respected charities and educational institutions. QIOs are accountable for making health care safer and more effective. They are directed by Medicare to make specific improvements in the safety and effectiveness of care. They are also charged with reviewing beneficiary complaints and responding to problems brought to them by individual patients. Medicare regularly evaluates QIO work and revisits their contracts every three years to make sure QIOs are making a difference.

What Are the Latest QIO Initiatives?

Through 2008, the QIOs will continue to accelerate the diffusion of evidence-based medicine into everyday clinical practice. As part of this effort, they will launch new initiatives aimed at improving safety on several fronts. These include:

- Helping hospitals make surgery safer.
- Helping doctors adopt and use information technology.
- Reducing hospital admissions for home care patients.
- Helping nursing homes increase resident satisfaction.
- Improving the quality of prescription drug therapy.