

Medicare's Investment in QIOs Pays Off

Since 1992, the nation has turned to Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) to make health care safer and more effective for millions of Americans. The nation's 40 QIOs represent the largest, single federal investment in improving health care quality. And that money is money well spent.

Projected total Medicare spending in 2006 is estimated at \$401.059 billion to cover 42.7 million Medicare beneficiaries. Of that total, Medicare will spend approximately \$287 million on the QIOs to improve overall health care safety and quality. This is roughly equal to about 50¢ per beneficiary per month and adds up to less than one-tenth of one percent of total Medicare spending.

What Does Medicare Get for that Investment?

Medicare gets a nationwide force of experts in every state dedicated to making patients safe, reducing medical errors, and spreading best practices to create more efficient systems of care that will ultimately improve health and quality of life for all patients.

QIOs make improvements that save lives and reduce suffering not only for Medicare beneficiaries, but for all patients. No other group has the experience or breadth to provide such intensive hands-on assistance in every state in the country. QIOs:

- Provide technical support, mentoring, education, and training to help health care professionals identify and implement changes that deliver safer, better care.
- Work with providers every day to help them reach specific clinical goals, such as preventing surgical complications.
- Help providers collect and publicly report data on performance measures to prompt tangible improvements in care and give consumers needed tools to make health care decisions.
- Serve as catalysts for spreading best practices and improving care in hospitals, outpatient clinics, doctors' offices, nursing homes, and home health agencies.

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- Help small and medium-sized physician practices identify and adopt electronic health record systems that will improve care and reduce errors.
- Respond to concerns and complaints from individual beneficiaries in order to identify and fix system-wide problems.

How QIOs Are Making a Difference

In every state across the country, QIOs can demonstrate that their work has saved lives and reduced suffering. Specifically, QIOs have made a difference in people's lives by:

- 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.
- Supporting home health agency efforts to help patients stay out of the hospital.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has demonstrated its confidence in QIOs by expanding QIO responsibilities repeatedly. In 2005, QIOs embarked on their 8th three-year contract to promote health care improvement.

In the past several years, QIOs have actively positioned themselves as leaders in improving nursing home care and home health care, reducing surgical infections, and improving treatment for chronic conditions and diseases such as congestive heart failure, pneumonia, and diabetes. In the next three years, QIOs will build on those achievements, helping thousands of physician practices to incorporate needed health information technology, helping hospitals increase surgical survival rates, and boosting resident satisfaction with nursing home care.

The American Health Quality Association is dedicated to improving the safety and effectiveness of health care. AHQA represents the national network of Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) that work with hospitals, medical practices, health plans, long-term care facilities, home health agencies, and employers to encourage the spread of best clinical practices and improve systems of care delivery.