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Online Tool Pinpoints Target Areas for Health Care Improvement in Each State

National Network of QIOs Poised to Help States Narrow Gaps

Washington, DC – An online tool released today by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) condenses 129 quality measures into state-specific data that state governments can use to focus their efforts to improve health care. The AHRQ State Snapshot tool allows state officials see where quality improvement efforts are succeeding – as well where more resources and attention are needed. Each state’s Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) can then help state officials target areas for greater improvement in health care quality.

“This online tool will help a Governor, state legislator, or health department chief track progress in closing quality gaps that harm the public health and cut productivity in their state,” said David Schulke, Executive Vice President of the American Health Quality Association (AHQA), “and there’s a QIO in every state and territory that can help them understand those gaps and work to narrow them.” AHQA is the association representing QIOs, a national network of state-based organizations that provide hands-on assistance to local health care providers and entities to help them improve the health care system.

The State Snapshot tool provides an indicator of each state’s overall health care quality performance as compared with other states and its own past performance. It also shows how each state performed based on settings of care, types of care, and selected clinical areas. Each state entry also includes a list of that state’s strongest and weakest performance areas.

The State Snapshot tool is based on data from the 2006 National Health Care Quality Report and its companion National Health Care Disparities Report, which were released by AHRQ earlier this year. The reports are compiled annually by AHRQ.

Nationally, the 2006 NHQR showed a modest overall gain of 3.1 percent in 40 core measures of health care quality. However, in areas where QIOs focused their efforts, the report showed an almost three-fold increase as compared to all other measures: a 10 percent average annual rate of improvement for QIO measures vs. 3.4 percent in non-QIO measures. The QIO measures concentrate resources on problem areas in heart attack, heart failure, pneumonia, home health and nursing home care.

In the 2005 NHQR, four out of the five areas that showed the most improvement were areas of targeted QIO efforts: diabetes, heart disease, respiratory conditions, and nursing home care. That report also noted that the pace of improvement in QIO-targeted care for pneumonia and heart disease alone was almost four times the combined rate for all other measures.

This year's State Snapshot data indicate that the quality of care varies widely even within various health care settings of the same state. No state ranked high in every measure. "There is room for improvement even in the highest performing state," said Schulke. "To target problems and sustain improvement in the quality of health care, it's vital for everyone to be reminded of the performance of the system of providers, payers, and patients," he concluded.

AHRQ's State Snapshot tool is available at: <http://statesnapshots.ahrq.gov/>. Find your state's QIO at: www.ahqa.org.

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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, long-term care facilities, home health agencies, health plans, pharmacies, and employers to encourage the spread of best clinical practices and improve systems of care delivery. Find your local QIO at: www.ahqa.org.