

In recognition of the importance of equity as a dimension of health quality, this year Health Quality Ontario asked Ontario health organizations, for the first time ever, to reflect on how they would address health equity in their quality improvement plans.

This snapshot of how well the organizations are integrating health equity into their work shows widespread variation between organizations in addressing this challenging element of quality care.

That's the main finding from the [first report](#) by Health Quality Ontario, focusing specifically on how more than 1000 health organizations are addressing the issue.

Health equity – the ability of all people to reach their full health potential and receive fair and appropriate care no matter where they live, what they have or who they are – is a strategic priority for Health Quality Ontario and one of the six dimensions of quality identified in [Quality Matters](#), a plan for health care quality.

Currently organizations from four sectors of the health care system (hospitals, inter-professional team-based primary care organizations, community care access centres, and long-term care homes) are required to submit such quality improvement plans to Health Quality Ontario annually, formalizing their improvement activities.

The report documented a wide variety of approaches being taken to address health equity and noted this was not surprising given the unique factors facing each organization and the populations they serve.

A similar variation in how advanced organizations are in their equity work was also seen.

“Some organizations are collecting and analyzing data to identify groups of patients with poor outcomes relative to the rest of their population, and some organizations have already identified populations and are designing and testing initiatives that address their specific needs,” the report states.

Twenty-seven organizations submitted health equity indicators describing specific, measurable concepts relevant to equity, with the majority of these (23) being primary care organizations.

These indicators and associated improvement strategies usually related to measuring and improving population health outcomes, ensuring equitable access to services and programs, and ensuring people are served in their preferred language.

For example, the Queen's Family Health Team in Kingston set the objective of ensuring people with intellectual and developmental disabilities receive an annual physical examination and set a target of 90% of these patients residing in group homes receiving such an exam within the past 18 months.

Organizations also described change ideas/activities to improve their performance on their indicators related to health equity with the collection and analysis of data being the most commonly reported activities through the use of either surveys or other standardized, validated, clinically relevant tools.

Many organizations reported that they are working to improve cultural competence among their staff to enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.

For example, the North Bay Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic aims to improve patient experience for Indigenous clients by providing cultural competency training to their staff. In order to do so, they are partnering with their local Indigenous Friendship Centre to provide training in local communities' culture and customs.

In their comments describing current or planned work related to health equity, themes most commonly mentioned by organizations related to language (mentioned by 44% of organizations) or cultural competency, although gender, Aboriginal/Indigenous populations, accessibility, poverty and rurality were also mentioned.

Overall, the report recognizes the challenges of addressing equity as a dimension of quality. This year, Health Quality Ontario did not specify indicators for organizations to approach this. In the future, this guidance will be provided.

Health Quality Ontario hopes release of the report will facilitate the spread of ideas to improve health equity across the province, thereby supporting its goal of better health for every Ontarian.