

✓ A Guide for Patients and Caregivers

What is a Quality Improvement Plan?

A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is a health care organization's formal plan to improve the care they provide to patients and their caregivers. Hospitals, long-term care homes, certain primary care organizations, and organizations that provide home care are legally required to submit a QIP to Health Quality Ontario each year by April 1st.

Each year, Health Quality Ontario asks the organizations that submit QIPs to focus on a handful of key issues that are priorities in Ontario, such as ensuring patients have timely access to care and ensuring patients are satisfied with the care they have received.

Health Quality Ontario provides specific measures, or indicators, that organizations can use to track their performance on these key issues over time. Examples of these indicators include the length of time patients spend waiting in the emergency department, and the results of surveying patients about their satisfaction with the care they have received. Health care organizations can also choose to work on improving on other indicators representing issues that are important for them and their patients.

There are opportunities for you to get involved in developing a QIP for a health care organization that has provided treatment to you or a loved one. By getting involved, you can help decide on what needs to be improved and how it should be done.

What does a Quality Improvement Plan look like?

There are three parts to a QIP:

1. The Progress Report: A report on progress from the previous year's plan
2. The Narrative: A brief summary of the plan
3. The Workplan (that is, the plan itself), which includes:
 - The indicators that the organization will be working on
 - How they are currently doing on these indicators
 - Targets for what kind of improvement they would like to see
 - Ideas on how they are going to improve to reach these targets

All QIPs are publicly posted. You can browse the QIPs of the organizations you are interested in by visiting Health Quality Ontario's QIP Navigator website (<https://qipnavigator.hqontario.ca/Resources/PostedQIPs.aspx>).

An example of how a QIP can help us improve on an important health care quality issue

Imagine your family doctor is part of a family health team. You have a scrape on your leg that is sore and oozing, and you're worried that it might be infected. You would like to be seen as soon as possible. You call your family health team to get an appointment, but the next available appointment is a week away.

The next day, you feel even worse, so you go to the emergency department. When you finally are seen, they diagnose you with an infection, prescribe antibiotics, and send you home.

The Issue: Timely access to primary care.

In this situation, it would have been best for you to see your family doctor quickly to get the antibiotics you needed.

By patients seeing their family doctor or appropriate provider in a timely fashion, it can prevent them from getting sicker and requiring more extensive care. The family doctor knows the patient's history and can consider other factors that might be important to the outcome of care.

Patient advisors who are part of the Quality Committee at your family health team report that the issue of timely access is important to them.

In this example, two of the six doctors have already implemented changes to improve timely access to care, with good results. The Quality Committee decides to focus the improvement work so that all doctors on the team use these principles so that any patient needing care can receive care in a timely manner.

The indicator: One indicator that is often used to track performance on this issue is based on a survey question about patients' perceptions of timely access:

The last time you were sick or were concerned you had a health problem, how many days did it take from when you first tried to see your doctor or nurse practitioner to when you actually saw him/her or someone else in their office?

- Same day
- Next day
- 2 – 19 days (enter number of days: _____)
- 20 or more days
- Not applicable (don't know/refused)

Your family health team includes this question on surveys it gives to patients throughout the year. When the Quality Committee first writes the QIP, they record how they are doing on the indicator at that time and set a target for improvement over the coming year. They find that 45% of their patients were able to receive an appointment on the same day or next day when they needed one. Since this data is available for each doctor in the clinic, they can provide feedback to individual physicians.

The Quality Committee might set a target to improve by 20% in one year (so go from 45% to 57% of patients reporting that they received an appointment on the same day or the next day). To reach this target, they will come up with one or more change ideas to improve their performance.

The change idea:

Change ideas refer to the approaches an organization uses to improve care. There are many different change ideas that could be used to improve timely access to care.

The Quality Committee decides that they will pair the physicians who have already implemented changes to improve timely access to care with physicians who have not yet tried this change. They will measure extent to which all physicians in the office are adopting advanced access scheduling and the number of appointments for each physician's schedule available for same day access.

They will continue to survey patients throughout the year and see how this change is affecting the indicator.

Why should you get involved in Quality Improvement Plans?

QIPs are designed to improve care and outcomes and to create a system that provides care **with** patients. As of September 1, 2015, all hospitals are required to work with patients to develop their QIPs. And although this is not required for other types of health care organizations, many of them are beginning to engage patients in the development of their QIPs as well.

As someone with first-hand experience in receiving care or caring for a loved one, your active participation in developing the QIP is important to ensure that the health care organization includes ideas that will improve the patient experience.

You are an expert in your health experiences, and bring valued insights to the table. By participating in developing an organization's QIP, you are using your expertise to help fix a problem. Your voice can improve the health system for future patients and caregivers.

How you can be involved: Key orientation questions

Deciding on improvement priorities and establishing goals is an important step for a health care organization. Organizations will look to engage with you, often through established formats such as patient councils, town halls, or focus groups. When you are involved in developing the QIP, it is important to be clear on what projects would be most meaningful to you so your ideas may be considered for inclusion. Below is a list of key questions to ask staff. Ask the questions to help you plan for important projects that have a positive impact.

Get ready for Quality Improvement Planning – Ask staff these questions to help you plan for developing the QIP, and decide when to be involved:

Where can I get education, training and staff support?

- QIPs include provincial as well as local priorities. Ask staff for education and training on the provincial requirements for the QIP. You may also want to be matched with a QIP expert or peer mentor to help you through the process.

Who are the people involved and what are their roles?

- Get to know all the people involved, and the many roles they play. Talk with staff and agree on your role, tasks, and amount of time you invest.

Developing QIPs – If you will be part of the team responsible for developing a QIP, consider these questions to ensure meaningful projects are being included and patient needs are being addressed:

What is the timeline for developing a QIP? What are some milestones on this timeline?

- Milestones are key events or achievements that will occur over the course of development of a QIP. Talk to the team about the timeline to develop the QIP and the important milestones on this timeline. This will help give you an idea of the time commitment that might be required at different stages of development.

One important milestone is when the QIP is approved by the Board before submission. This will occur before (but close to) submission. Another significant milestone is April 1st of each year – this is the date when the completed QIP must be submitted to Health Quality Ontario.

What issues related to care are important to improve on this year?

- You can make a big difference by identifying the issues that you think should be targeted for improvement. These may be selected from the list of key provincial issues (and their corresponding indicators), or they may be other issues specific to the organization that you are aware of or feel would be important to address. It's important for you to weigh in on what the organization will be working on over the coming year because you are the one that has experienced the care or services being delivered.

What are some goals for improvement?

- Every quality improvement project needs a clear focus and goals. Once the issues and problems to be worked on are identified, you can help to identify goals that you think will make a real difference to patients.

What changes can we make to ensure a positive outcome?

- Health care organizations may have some ideas on how they can go about achieving the goals that have been set. Listen to their ideas to see if they resonate with you. Your experience and insight can help an organization identify what needs to be done differently.

Follow-Up – Ask these questions to stay linked to the QIP, even after you are involved.

When and how often can I expect updates?

- QIP staff should follow up to let you know what the final plan looks like. If they don't follow up, you can ask them for an update. Ask questions to find out how your input was used. The organization should also publicly post the QIP on their website.

What role will patients and caregivers play in executing the improvement projects?

- Some of you may want to continue on with implementing a project. Let the staff know. You can make a valuable contribution by working alongside health care providers to test ideas for change.
- The first goal of quality improvement is to solve a problem. There may be a chance for you, or other patients and caregivers, to help organizational leaders make decisions to ensure the work is meaningful to all.

Important Things to Know:

- **Be Mindful of Privacy** – A lot of details are shared during QIP meetings. If you want to share details about your experiences that should not be recorded or repeated outside of a meeting, make this clear beforehand. Staff may ask you to sign a confidentiality (privacy) agreement before you can access some of the information about the organization. This means you will be asked not to share any private details that you learn during meetings.
- **Not All Input Is Used** – Your input is meaningful. But it's important to know that health organizations may be limited in what they can do with it. Not all of your input will be used as part of the QIP.
- **Be Patient** – It may be a long time before you see results from the time and effort you put in. But know that your steady input is leading to improvements that will be seen over time.

Reviewing Quality Improvement Plans

Ideally, you will be involved early in the process of creating a QIP. However, sometimes patient advisors may be asked to review a QIP when it is nearly completed. Here are some key points to consider as you review a QIP that has already been written.

Progress report

- As you read the progress report, can you identify where the organization made progress and where they encountered challenges?
- Does the Progress Report include descriptions of any lessons learned over the previous year?
- Do the topics resonate for you from your personal experience or an experience you've heard about?

Narrative

- Is the Narrative section easily understandable to patients, caregivers, family and the public?
 - Does the Narrative section show the organization's vision for improving the quality of care that they provide?
 - Does the Narrative section make the reader feel hopeful and excited about the ways in which the organization will be improving over the coming year?
 - Does the Narrative section show the organization's commitment to patient engagement and patient-centred care?
- Would a patient, caregiver, or family member reading the document see a potential role for themselves in the organization's work on quality improvement?

Workplan

- Do you think that the targets that have been set will inspire the organization to achieve improvement?
 - Will the planned improvement initiative(s) described improve the quality of care received by patients at the organization?
 - Are there examples where the planned improvement initiative(s) include plans to involve patient advisors?
- If not, why not? Can you suggest ideas for how patient advisors can contribute to the initiatives described?

The entire QIP

- Overall, does the QIP show the organization's commitment to improving the quality of care provided?
- Is it clear that the organization is building on lessons learned (as described in the Progress Report)?
- Are there any areas for improvement that you feel are missing in the QIP that should be addressed?

Glossary

Quality Improvement Plan (QIP): A QIP is a health care organization's formal plan to improve the care they provide to patients and their caregivers. Hospitals, long-term care homes, certain primary care organizations, and community care access centres (which provide home care) are legally required to submit a QIP to Health Quality Ontario each year by April 1st.

Indicator: A specific measurement that is used to track performance on quality issues over time. An example of an indicator is the percent of patients who reported that they were able to get an appointment with their primary care provider the same or next day when they needed it.

Quality issue: An aspect of care for which there is room for improvement across Ontario. An example of a quality issue is timely access to care.

Change idea: A specific approach that an organization will use to try to improve its performance on an indicator.

QIP Navigator website:

<https://qipnavigator.hqontario.ca/Resources/PostedQIPs.aspx>

If you have any questions or comments, or would like more details on this topic, contact engagement@hqontario.ca.

For related tools and resources visit Health Quality Ontario's Patient, Caregiver and Public Engagement Hub:
www.hqontario.ca/Engaging-Patients/Patient-Engagement-Tools-and-Resources