The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality’s (AHRQ) mission is to produce evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable, and work within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and with other partners to make sure that the evidence is understood and used.

AHRQ’s priority areas of focus are:

- Improve health care quality by accelerating implementation of patient-centered outcomes research (PCOR)
- Make health care safer
- Increase accessibility to health care
- Improve health care affordability, efficiency, and cost transparency

1. Improve health care quality by accelerating implementation of PCOR

The Affordable Care Act creates a national initiative to harness the potential of PCOR. As part of this effort, AHRQ is charged with investing in developing PCOR methods, training PCOR researchers, and disseminating PCOR findings. In 2014, this work will remain a high priority and AHRQ will build on its ongoing efforts and invest in an ambitious initiative to disseminate and support the implementation of PCOR findings in primary care practices. The dual goals of this work will be to meaningfully improve health outcomes through the use of PCOR, with a focus on improving cardiovascular health aligned with the Department’s Million Hearts initiative, and to improve the capacity of primary care practices to put PCOR evidence into practice.

2. Make health care safer

It is estimated that 1 in 7 hospital patients experience preventable harm in the course of their health care. AHRQ’s patient safety research investigates the ways patients are harmed, why this harm occurs, and how to prevent it. AHRQ translates the results of this research into practical tools for providers to use in making health care safer. The five components of this initiative are:

- Prevent healthcare-associated infections (HAIs)
  - AHRQ will expand its successful efforts to implement proven methods to reduce HAIs not only in hospitals but also in ambulatory care and long-term care settings.
- Accelerate patient safety improvement in hospitals
AHRRQ will use its new and existing patient safety tools to reduce hospital-acquired conditions targeted by HHS in the Partnership for Patients program.

- Reduce harm associated with obstetrical care
  - AHRRQ will use its TeamSTEPPS® program, established clinical protocols, and other approaches as the basis for reducing harm to mothers and babies.

- Improve safety and reduce medical liability
  - AHRRQ will draw from the findings of recent projects to develop a guide for implementing a Communication and Resolution Program. The project will test and refine the guide in preparation for nationwide implementation.

- Accelerate patient safety improvements in nursing homes
  - AHRRQ will provide technical assistance to nursing homes across the United States to reduce pressure ulcers, falls, HAIIs, and hospital admissions.

3. Increase accessibility to health care

AHRRQ, in collaboration with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, will lead efforts to provide evidence on the effects of health insurance coverage expansions on the health and financial security of the uninsured, on labor markets, on health care providers, particularly those in the safety net, and on employer and employee decisions with respect to employer-sponsored insurance. New evidence generated from this initiative will assist HHS’ Secretary, the Executive Branch, members of Congress, and policymakers with assessments and key decisions in these areas. Attention will be given to improving our understanding of the causes and consequences of lack of insurance, and the effects of health insurance expansions on access to care, utilization of health care, health care spending, affordability, and health outcomes.

4. Improve health care affordability, efficiency, and cost transparency

AHRRQ will facilitate cost and price transparency by improving the data, measures, and public reporting strategies needed to convey information on health care price and cost along with quality.

AHRRQ will also develop and spread evidence and tools to measure and enhance the efficiency of health systems—the capacity to produce better quality and outcomes while avoiding overutilization, or to maintain quality and outcomes with lower resource use. We will analyze variations in quality and resource use, and identify the factors that differentiate higher performing from lower performing systems.

For More Information

To learn more about AHRRQ, visit our Web site at: www.ahrq.gov.