



Introduction to the National Quality Strategy

The National Quality Strategy (NQS) was first published in March 2011 as the National Strategy for Quality Improvement in Health Care, and is led by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Today, the NQS serves as a guide for identifying and prioritizing quality improvement efforts, sharing lessons learned, and measuring the collective success of Federal, State, and public- and private-sector health care stakeholders across the country.

Aims

The NQS pursues three broad aims. These aims will be used to guide and assess local, State, and national efforts to improve health and the quality of health care.

- **Better Care:** Improve the overall quality by making health care more patient-centered, reliable, accessible, and safe.
- **Healthy People/Healthy Communities:** Improve the health of the U.S. population by supporting proven interventions to address behavioral, social, and environmental determinants of health in addition to delivering higher-quality care.
- **Affordable Care:** Reduce the cost of quality health care for individuals, families, employers, and government.

Priorities

The NQS focuses on six priorities that address the most common health concerns that Americans face. The Strategy's six priorities are:

 <p><i>Making care safer by reducing harm caused in the delivery of care.</i></p>	 <p><i>Ensuring that each person and family is engaged as partners in their care.</i></p>	 <p><i>Promoting effective communication and coordination of care.</i></p>	 <p><i>Promoting the most effective prevention and treatment practices for the leading causes of mortality, starting with cardiovascular disease.</i></p>	 <p><i>Working with communities to promote wide use of best practices to enable healthy living.</i></p>	 <p><i>Making quality care more affordable for individuals, families, employers, and governments by developing and spreading new health care delivery models.</i></p>
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Levers

The nine NQS levers are core business functions, resources, and/or actions that may serve as means for achieving improved health and health care quality. In many cases, stakeholders may already be using these levers but haven't connected these activities to NQS alignment. Use the following examples to discuss how your organization uses NQS levers:

<i>Lever</i>	<i>Example</i>
 Measurement and Feedback	A long-term care provider may implement a strategy that includes the use of Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement data to populate measurement dashboards for purposes of identifying and addressing areas requiring quality improvement.
 Public Reporting	A regional collaborative may ask member hospitals and medical practices to align public reports to the NQS aims or priorities.
 Learning and Technical Assistance	A Quality Improvement Organization may disseminate evidence-based best practices in quality improvement with physicians, hospitals, nursing homes, and home health agencies.
 Certification, Accreditation, Regulation	NQS aims and priorities may be incorporated into continuing education requirements or certification maintenance.
 Consumer Incentives and Benefit Designs	Employers may implement workforce wellness programs that promote prevention and provide incentives for employees to improve their health.
 Payment	Organizations may consider joining a coalition of purchasers that are pursuing value-based strategies.
 Health Information Technology	A hospital or medical practice may adopt an electronic health record system to improve communication and care coordination.
 Innovation and Diffusion	The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Innovation test various payment and service delivery models and share successful models across the Nation.
 Workforce Development	A medical leadership institution may incorporate quality improvement principles in their training.



Do You Already Align to the NQS?

The following prompts are meant to help your organization understand the variety of activities that constitute alignment to the NQS. Organizations do not need to engage in all listed activities in each box below to align to the Strategy, and the prompts below are not presented in order of importance. If your organization currently engages in many of the following activities, your organization likely already aligns to the NQS and may be ready to create a quality strategy using the NQS Quality Strategy Template. If your organization does not currently engage in a significant number of the following activities but is interested in learning more about the Strategy or how to align to it, please visit www.ahrq.gov/workingforquality. [Click here](#) to read more in-depth examples of organizational alignment to the Strategy featured in past NQS Annual Progress Reports, including the *5th Anniversary Update*.

Was your organization familiar with the following before consulting this document?

- ✓ *Three NQS Aims*
- ✓ *Six NQS Priorities*
- ✓ *Nine NQS Levers*
- ✓ *The National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Reports*

Does your organization currently report quality measures as part of any of the following CMS programs, which CMS has explicitly aligned to the six NQS priorities?

- ✓ *Physician Quality Reporting System (PQRS)*
- ✓ *Physician Compare*
- ✓ *Quality Rating System (QRS)*
- ✓ *End-Stage Renal Disease Quality Initiative*
- ✓ *Other*

Does your organization currently have a quality strategy that guides your health care improvement efforts? Does it include the three aims of the NQS?

- ✓ *Yes*
- ✓ *Some, but not all three*
- × *No*

In the last 12 months, has your organization...

- ✓ *Referred to or consulted the NQS as part of your work?*
- ✓ *Focused on at least one NQS priority to guide your health care improvement efforts?*
- ✓ *Referenced resources hosted on the Working for Quality Web site?*
- ✓ *Used an NQS lever within your organization?*

Is your organization interested in any of the following?

- ✓ *Measure alignment and harmonization resources*
- ✓ *Reducing health disparities*
- ✓ *Learning from others in the quality improvement field and their successes and challenges for quality improvement processes*
- ✓ *Improving population health*
- ✓ *Developing a quality strategy to guide your organization's quality improvement efforts*