

Continuous Quality Improvement

Gathering data today to help programs perform better tomorrow

Fact Sheet · October 2013

NPSCNLN Work Group on Evaluation and Quality Improvement

The National Peer Support Collaborative Learning Network is a joint initiative by Peers for Progress and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). The Network focuses on developing and sharing evidence of benefits of peer support programs, best practices, effective evaluation methods, models of organizing peer support within health systems as well as effective models of advocacy. The Network is supported through the Together on Diabetes Initiative of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation.

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) refers to a “continuous and ongoing effort to achieve measurable improvements in the efficiency, effectiveness, performance, accountability, outcomes, and other indicators of quality services or processes which achieve equity and improve the health of the community”¹. In other words, CQI involves the systematic assessment and feedback of evaluation information about planning, implementation, and outcomes to improve programs that are implemented repeatedly over time.

This fact sheet describes how CQI can benefit peer support programs, some areas that may be addressed in CQI, and factors that affect CQI initiatives. Additionally, you will find resources, protocols, tools, and methodologies for conducting CQI.

How CQI can benefit peer support programs:

- Assessing how well your program was planned, implemented, and evaluated can highlight practices that worked or improvements that need to be made.
- If you have already established a peer support program, monitoring changes in the needs of your target population resources, and desired goals can allow you to determine if program-wide changes are necessary.
- Documenting best practices can help all members of your program team perform to the best of their ability. For instance, if your programs have peer supporters that contact participants, developing a system to determine the success rates of different data collection techniques (e.g., number and times of phone calls, timing of phone calls, types of messages; participant’s satisfaction rates) can help you determine the best way for peer supporters to interact with participants.

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Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation
Together  Diabetes
Communities Uniting to Meet America's Diabetes Challenge

Methods for CQI

Quality Improvement initiatives can vary from organization to organization. The web links previously listed on this page include resources on best practices for CQI that could be helpful for your peer support program. Additionally, some common methods for CQI efforts are listed below:

- To understand staff's perceptions of your peer support program and to elicit helpful feedback, qualitative interviews can be conducted with personnel in your peer support program and/or peer supporters.
- Measures of participation, characteristics of participants, and/or satisfaction in peer support programs can help you identify what components of your peer support program are working and for whom.

Some areas that might be addressed in CQI:

- Assessing how well your program was planned, implemented, and evaluated can highlight practices that worked or improvements that need to be made.
- If you have already established a peer support program, monitoring changes in the needs of your target population resources, and desired goals can allow you to determine if program-wide changes are necessary.
- Documenting best practices can help all members of your program team perform to the best of their ability. For instance, if your programs have peer supporters that contact participants, developing a system to determine the success rates of different data collection techniques (e.g., number and times of phone calls, timing of phone calls, types of messages; participant's satisfaction rates) can help you determine the best way for peer supporters to interact with participants.

Some factors that affect CQI Initiatives:

1. Leadership commitment: Having leadership of the organization committed to quality improvement help with "the **process** (e.g., building the infrastructure, processes, and systems needed for effective QI) and the **human** side of change (e.g., alleviating staff resistance, maintaining transparency, meeting training needs, attaining staff support)."
2. Quality improvement infrastructure: infrastructure must be in place to ensure that QI efforts are aligned with the organization's mission, vision, and strategic direction and that QI is linked to organizational performance. Infrastructure should include a QI plan and QI committee to oversee the implantation of the work.
3. Employee empowerment and commitment: "leadership must empower employees by providing ongoing training opportunities, granting authority to make decisions relative to quality, and eliminating fear of consequence or placing blame. Additionally, QI champions must be identified, cultivated, and gradually diffused throughout the organization as they spread expertise and advocate for QI, reducing the impact of any staff turnover."
4. Teamwork and collaboration: QI is "an organization-wide effort that cannot be accomplished without teamwork and collaboration. Teams should routinely be formed to brainstorm, solve problems, implement QI projects, and share lessons learned."
5. Continuous improvement: QI is a never ending cycle of improving through identifying the root causes of problems. It is important to plan for the sustainable and continuous quality improvement initiatives.

Learn more about CQI:

The Plan-Do-Check Act (PDCA) Cycle is a popular CQI tool that can be used for public health programs. It involves a systematic cycle for practitioners to plan, implement, evaluate, and adapt programs to determine whether desired improvements have been made. [\[Read More\]](#)

Rutgers has developed a free software program to assist practitioners in documenting data from quality improvement interventions. [\[Read More\]](#)

The Healthcare Improvement Skills Center offers resources for practitioners to assess, and enhance their QI skills. [\[Read More\]](#)

The American Academy of Family Physicians provides information for practitioners to implement QI initiatives. It also provides an overview of methodologies used to support QI. [\[Read More\]](#)

Example Protocols & Tools for CQI

The Breakthrough Series from the Institute for Health Care Improvements is designed to help healthcare organizations make “breakthroughs” in their quality and has been used in order to increase quality of chronic illness care. [\[Read More\]](#)

In the Getting to Outcomes framework, CQI is an essential component for practitioners when developing and planning programs. Page 137 of this handbook provides information on CQI, details on its importance, an example from the field, and ten questions that can be used as a tool for other practitioners in developing CQI measures. [\[Read More\]](#)

1. [Riley et al, “Defining Quality Improvement in Public Health”, JPHMP, 2010, 16\(10\), 5-7](#)
2. <http://qiroadmap.org/culture-to-qi/foundational-elements-for-building-a-qi-culture/>