

Quality Improvement

Why Do It?

Primary care homes work continuously to measure and improve the quality of care they provide to their patient population. Practice leaders should be familiar with quality improvement strategies such as the Model for Improvement (and the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle) and other process improvement methods in order to adopt a quality improvement process that works best for their practice. Tools, worksheets, diagrams and visual management techniques can help practice teams identify issues and problems and design processes and workflows. Be sure to also check out the tip sheets on *Collecting & Using Data* and *Culture & Change Management*. The [Institute website](#) offers an array of resources on [quality improvement](#), including the webinar “[Building Sustainable Quality Improvement Systems in your Practice](#)”.

Where to Start

1. Clarify your intentions. Whether PCPCH or some other roadmap, be clear about the overall goal you are trying to achieve, and just as importantly, the reason behind the change. Make sure that goals are communicated and understood at all levels of the clinic. Recognize that your staff have different learning styles and you may need to communicate information several times and in different ways to ensure everyone understands. Develop talking points both for communicating with your staff and with your patients (also see the tip sheet on *Patient & Family Engagement*).

2. Engage the whole clinic in suggesting and deciding on improvement initiatives. Pick the things that people are already focused on, whether because they are excited to try something new or frustrated by a process that isn't working. Patients are also an important source of ideas, whether through surveys, advisory councils or suggestion boxes.

3. Carve out the time. Shut down the clinic for all-staff meetings and trainings. Accept that this work is going to require taking people offline from revenue-generating activities for a period of time (also see the tip sheet on *Leadership*).

4. Create interdisciplinary committees to champion specific improvement projects. Recruit people who represent different areas and spheres of the clinic including the front office and medical assistants. Partner with teams

“We really had to slow down the process so the staff could get accustomed to it. We were able to go through it with minimal staff turnover...The providers are very supportive, I think. It’s really taking the staff and have them be very involved in the process, through the PDSAs and communication...they’re very involved.”

PCPCH tip sheets were developed from the reported experiences of recognized PCPCH’s, by a Portland State University research team under contract with the Oregon Health Authority, 2016. These recommendations are not part of the official OHA technical assistance guide and are not a guarantee of program recognition. Access this Tip Sheet and other resources: <http://www.pccpi.org/search/resources>.

who are interested in piloting a specific change; those who are enthusiastic should go first, providing time to troubleshoot challenges that may come up and giving more skeptical employees time to observe (see the tip sheet on *Team Based Care*).

5. Be clear and transparent about your process and results. Use Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles, making sure everyone in the clinic understands how these work and why they are being used. Communicate both at the beginning and end of a change cycle to ensure people feel closure and accomplishment before moving on to a new project or the next step in an existing project. Use visual media such as storyboards and dashboards in common areas so staff can monitor progress and share feedback.

6. Accept that improvement is a trial and error process. You may have to try something several times before you find the right process. Let your staff know it's okay not to succeed on the first try. People may initially want to hide evidence of poor performance. This is an important opportunity to normalize the idea that the clinic's outcomes are everyone's responsibility, not just the sphere of an individual person or team (see the tip sheet on *Culture & Change Management*).

7. Don't forget to celebrate your successes!

Tips for Making the Most of Quality Improvement

- ❖ **Join a learning collaborative.** These can be important sources of ideas for improvement projects, and provide an opportunity to work on a project simultaneously with other clinics to share experiences, challenges and solutions. Some collaboratives provide resources, financial support and hands-on technical assistance to clinics during improvement initiatives.
- ❖ **Having a change champion** can be an effective way to inspire others and build support for improvement activities, but be mindful that this person also needs support and encouragement so they don't become burned out (see the tip sheet on *Leadership*).
- ❖ Providers make good champions because they can “speak the language” to other providers. If no one in your clinic can fulfill this role, **look to providers from partner clinics or learning collaboratives** who will share their experiences.
- ❖ **Lead by example.** Make sure the clinic's senior administrators and clinicians are sending a signal to staff that quality improvement activities are a priority by attending meetings and participating in improvement activities.

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