



Health Policy Snapshot

Health Care Quality

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ISSUE BRIEF

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How are local efforts improving health care quality?

Takeaways:

- Groups and individuals across the country are working to improve the quality of care at the local level by designing and implementing changes in the way health care is organized, delivered and paid for in their community.
- Large-scale private and public initiatives represent investments of more than half a billion dollars to improve health care in select regions.

Overview

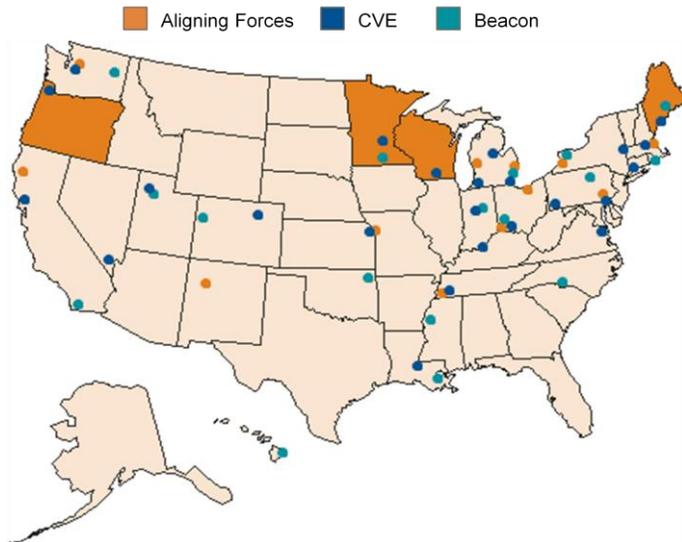
American health care faces a quality crisis. There is a dangerous divide between the high quality of care our health care system is capable of delivering and the uneven quality that it is actually delivering. While this is a national problem, health care is delivered locally and fixing it requires local action. With significant private and public funding, concerted regional efforts to improve the care delivered in communities have grown in recent years and are serving as models for national reform. These initiatives usually are led by local health care experts and groups seeking to enhance quality, increase use of health information technology, measure and report the performance of providers, engage consumers and re-think how we pay for care. Three of the largest funders of regional initiatives are the federal

government, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. Together they have invested more than half a billion dollars to improve health care in select areas.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

The Department of Health and Human Services has created a number of programs to enhance quality of care and use of health information technology (HIT):

- **The Beacon Community Program**, a \$265 million initiative by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, provides funding to 17 communities across the country that are leading in adoption of electronic health records (EHRs) and health information exchanges. The program's goal is to improve care coordination, increase care quality, slow the growth of health care spending in the select communities and demonstrate the ability of HIT to transform their local health care systems.
- **Chartered Value Exchange (CVE) Project** helps 24 local collaborations of consumers, providers and payers improve health care based on recognized quality and price standards. Supported by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, participants get access to Medicare data critical to measuring the quality of health care delivery in their community.
- **The Health Information Technology Extension Program**, a \$677 million initiative by the



Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT, consists of Health Information Technology Regional Extension Centers (RECs) and a national Health Information Technology Research Center. The 62 RECs cover every region of the country, supporting and serving health care providers by helping them become meaningful users of EHRs. "Meaningful use" defines HIT use that leads to improvements in health care and helps clinicians better share information. The research center helps the RECs work with one another and with relevant stakeholders to identify and share best practices in EHR adoption, meaningful use and provider support. Already, 67,000 primary care physicians are working with Regional Extension Centers to improve the care for the estimated 100 million patients they serve.

PRIVATE PROGRAMS

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation launched *Aligning Forces for Quality* (AF4Q) in 2006, as part of its \$300 million effort to improve the quality and equality of U.S. health care. The largest effort to improve domestic health care quality ever undertaken by a U.S. philanthropy, the program works to improve health care by engaging patients,

publicly reporting the performance of physicians and hospitals and improving a community's quality of care. The Foundation hopes it will advance national reform through models providing resources, expertise and training to providers, payers and consumers. To date, all 16 communities have published physician measurement reports that are publicly available, allowing consumers to make decisions about their providers based on the quality of care they provide.

Other organizations such as the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) also are working on local quality of care issues. IHI developed its Triple Aim program to improve the health of local communities, enhance the patient experience of care and control, if not reduce, per capita costs. Now in its fifth phase, the program has many success stories. One Triple Aim organization's blueprint demonstrates how U.S. employers could potentially save \$40 billion annually if the employers take the recommended steps to ensure that employees have better access to health services, which could lead to improved health.¹

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- [*Aligning Forces for Quality* \(RWJF\)](#)
- [*The Triple Aim* \(Institute for Healthcare Improvement\)](#)
- [*Get the Facts about Regional Extension Centers* \(DHS\)](#)
- [*Get the Facts about the Beacon Community Program* \(DHS\)](#)
- [*Creating Regional, Cross-System Quality Improvement Early Lessons from Three Multi-Stakeholder Coalitions* \(CHCS\)](#)
- [*AHRQ Learning Network for Chartered Value Exchanges* \(DHS\)](#)

¹ <http://www.ihl.org/NR/rdonlyres/0CD69521-B9C6-41C8-9643-BF33BFD0BF77/0/IHITripleAimBellinHealthSummaryofSuccessJul09v2.pdf>