

Quality Healthcare Fact Sheet

WHAT DOES "QUALITY HEALTHCARE" MEAN?

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) have long struggled to obtain and access quality healthcare, despite the fact that the federal government's trust agreements with AI/AN governments included providing healthcare services for AI/AN communities. Though the first federal appropriations for AI/AN healthcare occurred more than 180 years ago, the pace of change from the healthcare system of the past to one which delivers truly quality care consistently to all AI/ANs has been frustratingly slow. (1)

During their lifetime, Elders have likely experienced poor services, barrier to access, and outright discrimination when trying to access healthcare. However, the new millennium has brought a push to improve healthcare systems and recent legislation has reshaped the way healthcare is delivered to all people in the United States. AI/AN Elders stand to benefit from these changes which seek to create "quality" healthcare for all.

While "quality" healthcare sounds simple, **there are six different aspects to healthcare delivery that determine the "quality" of the care itself and the value to patients in the end.** The Institute of Medicine (IOM) developed six "aims for improvement" to healthcare in 2001, and they have greatly influenced the direction of healthcare improvement in the United States. These aims are:



Safety. Healthcare must be safe for the patient. This means that healthcare should be helping, not harming patients. The focus toward improving safety is on the healthcare system, as patients are more likely to be hurt by flaws in the healthcare system than actions of a specific healthcare worker.



Effectiveness. When care is effective, it means the patient is receiving the right treatment for their ailment and that patients do not receive treatments which have risks that outweigh potential benefits. It also means that different patients consistently receive the right level of care for a condition based on the guidelines related to that ailment.



Patient-Centered Focus. Ensures that the patient is treated with care and consideration for cultural differences and their own unique healthcare needs. A patient-centered focus means that medical professionals will help patients understand their condition, the available care options, and respect the patient's health care choices. It also should mean that the patient does not suffer and is treated with respect. *See NICOA's factsheet on Culturally Competent Healthcare for more information about patient-centered healthcare and what it means for AI/AN Elders.*



Timeliness. Care that is timely demands that patients are not subjected to long waits – whether it is in a doctor’s office, in the emergency room, for a test, or a surgery. Waiting can take an emotional toll and untimely delivery of healthcare services harms patients as delays can hurt or even kill.



Efficiency. Efficient care means more than cutting costs. Efficient healthcare makes the most of the resources available to the healthcare system such as better use of time, equipment, supplies, and staff to deliver better healthcare to patients.



Equitability. Equitable care means that everyone gets access to quality care regardless of race, age, gender, income, or any other difference. It also means that the healthcare system helps to reduce disparities in health outcomes for patients. *See NICOA’s factsheet on Health Disparities for more information. (2)(3)(4)*

Elders can attest to the fact that healthcare in AI/AN communities has historically failed to meet most, or even all, of those objectives. But the changes made by the 2010 Affordable Care Act have already helped to improve the safety and effectiveness of healthcare across the U.S. and reduce the cost to the patient *See NICOA’s ACA factsheet for more information. (5)*

IMPROVING HEALTHCARE QUALITY

The Indian Health Service (IHS) has launched the Improving Patient Care program which has adopted the six aims approach to improve the care Elders receive in their own communities. If you or someone you know is not receiving quality healthcare, consider reporting or registering a complaint. (6)

If you have a suggestion or complaint concerning the service provided at an IHS facility, contact the facility to determine what their specific complaint process is. A listing of all IHS facilities can be found in the Indian Health Services Directory at www.ihs.gov.

For complaints about the quality of care you got from a Medicare provider, contact your Beneficiary and Family Centered Care Quality Improvement Organization or call 1-800-Medicare.

**Indian Health Service (IHS), an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for providing federal health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives.*

SOURCES

- 1). Kaiser Family Foundation, <https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/legal-and-historical-roots-of-health-care-for-american-indians-and-alaska-natives-in-the-united-states.pdf>
- 2). Indian Health Services, http://www.ihs.gov/ipc/?module=dsp_ipc_models_caremodel
- 3). The American Academy of Otolaryngology, <http://www.entnet.org/content/how-quality-defined>
- 4). Institute for Healthcare Improvement, <http://www.ihl.org/resources/pages/improvementstories/acrossthechasmsixaimsforchangingthehealthcaresystem.aspx>
- 5). White House, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/03/25/4-ways-affordable-care-act-improving-quality-health-care-america>
- 6). Indian Health Services, http://www.ihs.gov/ipc/?module=dsp_ipc_models_caremodel