

## Get Involved in Quality Improvement:

# ✓ A Guide for Patient and Caregiver Advisors

### What is Quality Improvement?

Quality Improvement is the process that health organizations (like hospitals or walk-in clinics) use to improve how they plan and give care to patients and their caregivers.

- Many health organizations have teams that focus on Quality Improvement. Visit the [Health Quality Ontario](#) website to watch a video to learn more about Quality Improvement, and who may be part of it.
- Quality Improvement always starts with health organizations choosing one issue or problem to focus on. For example, a hospital may use a Quality Improvement process to reduce wait times in a clinic. Visit the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's](#) website for other examples.
- There are few models for doing Quality Improvement. To learn more about how they all work, visit the [Department of Community and Family Medicine, Duke University School of Medicine](#) website.

### Why should you get involved in Quality Improvement?

Quality Improvement is a key way to improve the patient experience, health outcomes and health care staff training. As someone with first-hand experience in getting care, or caring for a loved one, you can have a big part to play.

You are an expert in your health experiences, and bring valued insights to the table. By taking part in Quality Improvement you are using your expertise to help fix a problem. Your voice can improve the health system for future patients and caregivers. In Quality Improvement, this is called the "[Voice of the Customer](#)".

### How You Can Be Involved: Key Questions For Staff

When you find a Quality Improvement project you want to be involved in, it's important to be clear on what your role will be and how you can be involved. Below is a list of key questions to ask Quality Improvement staff. Ask the questions to help you plan, be part of and follow-up with Quality Improvement projects.

Plan for Quality Improvement – Ask staff these questions to help you plan for your involvement in Quality Improvement, and to help you decide when to be involved:

#### 1. What is the main issue or problem, and goals for improvement?

Every Quality Improvement project has a clear focus and goals. It's important that you understand what these are, and think about whether you agree with them.

#### 2. Who are the people involved and what are their roles?

Get to know all the people involved, and the many roles they play. Talk with staff and agree on your role, tasks and amount of time you invest.

### 3. How will I be involved?

There are many ways you can take part in a Quality Improvement project. For example, you may be asked to join a working group or committee, take part in one-on-one conversations, or to fill out a one-time survey. Think about how much time and effort you're willing to put into the project.

### 4. Will I be given compensation (money, or other rewards) for being involved?

Every organization approaches this differently. Some health organizations compensate patients and caregivers for their time, and many use other ways to say thank you. When getting involved, you could inquire about whether you could be reimbursed for transit, receive refreshments during meetings, or receive support for other needs.

## Doing Quality Improvement – Ask these questions to be involved in the ways you prefer:

### 1. Where can I get education, training and staff support?

Doing Quality Improvement can be hard if it's new to you. Ask staff for education and training, or to be matched with a Quality Improvement expert or peer mentor to help guide you through the process.

### 2. What are the Quality Improvement milestones or timelines?

"Milestones" are key events or achievements during a project. They are a good way to tell if a project is reaching its goals. Project timelines will let you know how long you will be involved.

### 3. How many Quality Improvement cycles will there be?

Quality Improvement occurs over time. Quality Improvement staff use [run charts](#) and other tools to track change over many [cycles](#). It's important to ask staff how many cycles a project may take. This will give you a sense of how long it may take for your input to lead to improvement.

## Follow-Up – Ask these questions to stay linked to the Quality Improvement project, even after you are involved.

### 1. When and how often can I expect updates?

Quality Improvement staff should let you know the final results of a project. If they don't follow up, you can ask them for an update. Ask questions to find out how your input was used.

### 2. What role will patients and caregivers play in spreading improvements?

The first goal of Quality Improvement is to solve a problem. The second goal is to [spread](#) the solution to other common sites. There may be a chance for you, or other patients and caregivers, to help spread improvements.

## Important Things to Know:

- **Be Mindful of Privacy** – A lot of details are shared during Quality Improvement meetings. If you want to share details that should not be recorded or repeated outside of a meeting, make this clear beforehand. Also, staff may ask you to sign a confidentiality (privacy) agreement. This means you will be asked not to share any private details that you learn during meetings.
- **Not All Input Is Used** – Your input is meaningful. It's important too to know that health organizations may be limited in what they can do with it. Not all of your input may be used as part of Quality Improvement.
- **Be Patient** – It may be a long time before you see results from the time and effort you put in. But know that your steady input is leading to improvements that will be seen over time.

**Voice of the Customer** [www.hqontario.ca/portals/0/documents/qi/qi-voc-primer-en.pdf](http://www.hqontario.ca/portals/0/documents/qi/qi-voc-primer-en.pdf)

**Run Charts** [www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/Tools/RunChart.aspx](http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/Tools/RunChart.aspx)

**Cycles** [www.institute.nhs.uk/quality\\_and\\_service\\_improvement\\_tools/quality\\_and\\_service\\_improvement\\_tools/plan\\_do\\_study\\_act.html](http://www.institute.nhs.uk/quality_and_service_improvement_tools/quality_and_service_improvement_tools/plan_do_study_act.html)

**Spread** [www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/HowtoImprove/ScienceofImprovementSpreadingChanges.aspx](http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/HowtoImprove/ScienceofImprovementSpreadingChanges.aspx)

If you have any questions or comments, or would like more details on this topic, contact [engagement@hqontario.ca](mailto:engagement@hqontario.ca).

For related tools and resources visit Health Quality Ontario's Patient, Caregiver and Public Engagement Hub: [www.hqontario.ca/toolsandresources](http://www.hqontario.ca/toolsandresources)