



**NATIONAL  
QUALITY FORUM**

Driving measurable health  
improvements together

# A Strategic Plan for Achieving The Care We Need.

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**FOR THE PAST 20 YEARS**, National Quality Forum (NQF) members have been at the forefront of advancing safe, high quality care that tackles the healthcare system’s most enduring challenges and urgent needs. NQF’s greatest strength is that we are a public/private partnership of diverse stakeholders who work together to drive measurable health improvements for the benefit of all people and the nation as a whole.

We have come a long way since the Institute of Medicine’s report, *To Err is Human*<sup>1</sup>, expanding beyond preventing errors to a more comprehensive commitment to improving healthcare quality for all. Fundamental to that goal is building a stronger, more focused, and cohesive healthcare quality ecosystem – one that is motivated and incentivized to get to better, safer, and more equitable outcomes by considering the needs of each individual and overcoming the real-world constraints that exist through the care journey. This requires multistakeholder collaboration to break down silos, address disparities, embrace innovation, prevent avoidable harm, and create more person-driven measures of quality that produce better health outcomes and deliver greater value for patients, providers, and payors alike.

Despite having made great strides through quality measures and associated improvements, all of us are frustrated with the pace of change. COVID-19 magnified the deep inequities in our system that are at the core of our country’s relatively poor health outcomes. Systematically addressing the wide spectrum of disparities is essential to achieve better health outcomes across the country. Now more than ever, NQF can lead in a way that no other organization can—together, we can normalize high-quality and high-value care.

We need a long-term strategy for uniting a fragmented healthcare system capable of caring for all, and that is the focus of NQF’s new Strategic Plan. We can and must create an ecosystem that leads the industrialized world in quality and value.

Earlier this year, NQF released its report, *The Care We Need*, which provides a roadmap for achieving the healthcare quality we all seek. We assembled the National Quality Task Force, the broadest and most diverse set of stakeholders NQF had convened to date. The Task Force took an unflinching look at the flaws in our healthcare quality ecosystem and provided a framework of five strategic objectives and a series of interrelated recommendations for creating person-centered care that supports better health outcomes across populations.

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine (US) Committee on Quality of Health Care in America; Kohn LT, Corrigan JM, Donaldson MS, editors. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2000.

Our Strategic Plan builds on that roadmap for change. It is bold in its aspirations, honest in what it takes to achieve our goals, and actionable in how to make measurable progress toward achieving them. We address the call for better outcomes by integrating patients' voices throughout measurement and evaluation, decreasing measure burden, and driving cohesion that shapes a strong and nurturing healthcare quality ecosystem.

This Strategic Plan focuses on three areas: Health of Our Mission, Health of Our People, and Health of Our Organization. The Health of Our Mission is comprised of six goals to create a better and more equitable healthcare quality ecosystem:

- 1. Define the national measurement architecture to drive improvement in quality and value.**
- 2. Advance health equity and address disparities.**
- 3. Become a national leader in defining measures for equitable patient and family engagement.**
- 4. Develop measurement approaches utilized in value-based payment arrangements.**
- 5. Promote the transformation to digital health.**
- 6. Close quality gaps for national healthcare priorities.**

We lay out a bold vision for the future with these six goals, recognizing that they can only be accomplished with continued focus on equipping our community of diverse stakeholders to lead, contribute, and shape the future. We will lean into the expertise of our staff, how we nurture and support them, and the overall health of our organization to ensure it can achieve these critical goals.

It will not be easy to create the high-quality healthcare system that every one of NQF's diverse stakeholders aspires to see – one that is safe, equitable, and affordable. But it can be done. Progress starts with an actionable strategy, the right people at the table, and the collective will to move forward. Everyone must push to be better, to cede territory, combine expertise and efforts, and look past the short-term to make quality, personalized care that improves health outcomes a common experience for every person, especially the most vulnerable. Together, our truly diverse, thoughtful, and innovative community of stakeholders can and will drive the next generation of quality for all.



Shantanu Agrawal  
President & CEO, NQF



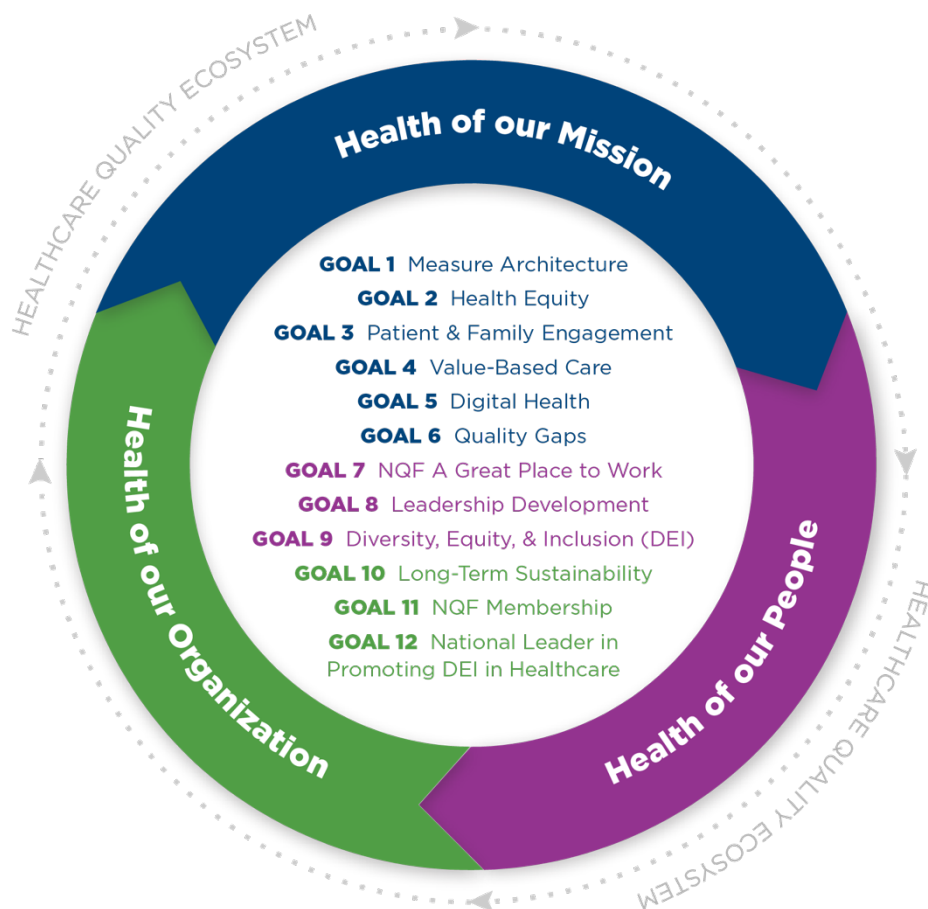
Jon Perlin  
Board Chair, NQF

## STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The goals included in this Strategic Plan reflect how NQF sees the healthcare quality ecosystem, and more specifically, our role in it. The term ecosystem is defined in the business world as the network of organizations—including suppliers, distributors, customers, competitors, government agencies, and so on—involved in the delivery of specific products or services through both competition and cooperation or partnership. Each entity affects the others. The healthcare quality ecosystem includes many stakeholders—healthcare providers, patients and their families, measure developers, payors, government, and clinicians—who need a place to obtain non-biased healthcare measurement information. NQF is that place where discussions can be had, consensus can be reached, and the best science is elevated in measurement and quality improvement.

It is imperative that solutions are driven by multiple stakeholders from across the system because there is no single organization solely responsible for providing solutions. NQF is renewing its commitment to serve as the organization that convenes experts to identify and define measures, collect and share data, set standards, and provide recommendations to achieve high-value care - care that is safe, personally appropriate, optimizes health outcomes, and eliminates waste by using resources efficiently. NQF synthesizes inputs from across the healthcare quality ecosystem, makes meaning of them, and provides viable recommendations in ways that no other organization can. Through these efforts, NQF serves as a steward of the healthcare quality ecosystem, and this strategy brings everyone together to address the needs of the ecosystem.

## Five Year Strategic Plan



NQF's role in the healthcare quality ecosystem drives the Strategic Plan's three main areas of focus, all of which are vital to the long-term success and NQF's mission. These include:

**Health of Our Mission:** Sustain and grow the commitment to be the trusted voice driving measurable health improvements.

**Health of Our People:** Ensure staff can contribute, collaborate, and lead to achieve our mission.

**Health of Our Organization:** Maintain the long-term viability and sustainability of the organization.

Each of these topics has crosscutting values. For example, health equity is woven across all three focus areas. The goals themselves are a result of numerous discussions with NQF's Board of Directors, staff, and key stakeholders. They represent a consensus on the healthcare quality ecosystem needs and are framed broadly to allow adjustments in response to unforeseen events such as the global COVID-19 pandemic.

## HEALTH OF OUR MISSION

### GOAL 1

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**Define the national architecture of measurement to drive improvement in safety, equity, quality and value.**

NQF will lead the development of designing and building a national measurement architecture, a framework and set of principles guiding the design and use of quality measures to address critical and emerging healthcare issues. A national measurement architecture will help payors, purchasers, clinicians, and patients identify high-value healthcare while supporting the clinician and provider community in achieving meaningful, measurable performance.

The architecture will focus on driving value in the healthcare system, addressing health equity, and incorporating public and population health. NQF will use its unique convening power to bring together stakeholders from across healthcare, including community-based organizations, to develop evidence-based recommendations that drive the future of quality measurement. This goal serves as a foundation for achieving many of the other goals in the Strategic Plan.

A national measurement architecture is needed to ensure that measures fully address patient needs, identify gaps in measurement, safely reduce the burden of measures on providers, and improve care to deliver better health and outcomes for patients. Quality measurement has historically focused on addressing individual healthcare

issues rather than looking holistically across the needs of the patient. This has resulted in an overabundance of quality measures, making it difficult for clinicians, providers, payors, purchasers, and patients to discern which measures improve care. It also led to significant reporting burdens for clinicians and providers, compromising their ability to focus on improving care.

The current "one size fits all" measurement approach no longer meets the needs of the changing healthcare environment. Telehealth, which became a key vehicle for care during the COVID-19 pandemic, has significant measurement gaps that make it difficult to assess the overall quality of care. The pandemic also illuminated how current measures do not adequately address health disparities that affect large populations across the country. Today's patients also seek to be included in the identification and design of measures that are meaningful to their care experience. Communities want to ensure that those most impacted are involved in a quality measurement process that drives safe, equitable care and that improves quality and health outcomes.

Creating an effective national measurement architecture requires collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including measure developers, to adopt and promote current measures and to guide quality measurement development. NQF will rely on this architecture to modify measure endorsement and assess measures against key priorities such as patient and family engagement and health equity.

## **GOAL 2**

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### **Advance health equity by improving quality measurement and implementation.**

NQF will use its unique convening power to collaboratively develop and promote policies and implementation practices advancing the use of data, measurement, and payment models to achieve health equity. This includes addressing quality and measurement gaps in key national health priorities, such as maternal health and access to care. In addition, NQF will build on its previous work addressing data integration to implement a plan that links social determinants of health with clinical data, measurement, and interventions. The integration of data on social determinants and social needs is critical for improving the health of individuals and communities.

NQF will drive measurable improvements by incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout its internal and external programs.

NQF will help healthcare organizations strive to promote health equity in everything they do, including rising to the challenge of addressing systemic issues such as implicit bias that lead to disparities in avoidable harm, access and the experience of care, and health outcomes. NQF will recommend measurement approaches around health equity to assist healthcare organizations in measuring their progress.

Health equity is fundamental to all quality improvement efforts. Addressing the wide spectrum of disparities must be considered a key component for successful health outcomes across the nation. The events of the past year have magnified the health equity challenges facing the healthcare quality ecosystem. Social and environmental factors—often referred to as social determinants of health (SDOH)—drive as much as 60 percent of health outcomes while healthcare services contribute to less than 10 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Payors, purchasers, providers, measure developers, and healthcare leaders increasingly recognize that addressing SDOH is key to driving meaningful health improvements across populations. However, stakeholders need guidance and resources on how best to use payment to support successful innovation in improving SDOH, what interventions to invest in, and which payment models can most positively impact health outcomes.

While health equity is impacted by a range of factors inside and outside of healthcare, NQF's work within this goal will focus on improvements within the healthcare quality ecosystem. However, outcomes will benefit from partnership and coordination with other stakeholders throughout the process, such as public health and social services. NQF will capitalize on partnership opportunities to strengthen the impact of its work. Since a majority of the goals identified in this plan are impacted by addressing equity issues, NQF will incorporate a health equity focus across all areas of its Strategic Plan, including topics related to measure architecture, value-based care, payment reform, and operations.

## **GOAL 3**

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### **Become a national leader in defining measures of equitable engagement of patient and family voices.**

NQF will work to achieve this goal through the lens of quality measurement, focusing on defining measures inclusive of these voices and encouraging engagement of patients and families in the measure endorsement process. NQF will also support and partner with measure developers on ways to incorporate patients and families into measure development and support development of more patient-reported outcome measures. This ensures that measures target improving quality and safety in areas that are most important to patients. Connected to measurement, NQF will also encourage the implementation of patient engagement approaches such as shared decision-making and other best practices. Lack of consistent and meaningful

<sup>2</sup> Cantor M.N. & Thorpe L. (2018). Integrating data on social determinants of health into electronic health records. *Health Affairs*, 37, 585-590

patient engagement is a systemic issue that must be addressed. While meaningful engagement of patients and family members in their care is critical for producing better outcomes, they are often not engaged at all or only as an afterthought.

The entire healthcare quality ecosystem must more fully engage patients. Therefore, patient and family engagement are priorities throughout the Strategic Plan. For instance, a national measure architecture would further prioritize patient and family engagement in measure development. Health equity can only be achieved through further engagement with patients. Incorporating patient and family voices across all work is fundamental to the success of NQF's collaborative process and recommendations.

#### **GOAL 4**

##### **Facilitate the development of measurement approaches utilized in value-based payment arrangements.**

NQF will evaluate the measures used in payment models to determine if they truly drive value and succeed in beneficial payment reform. NQF will also recommend principles and approaches to evaluate the way measures are used together in payment models. This will ensure that payment models contain the right incentives to encourage innovation and drive quality. Achieving this goal will also include encouraging adoption of common measure sets and systems in payment models across the healthcare quality ecosystem. These measure sets must reduce measure burden that does not add value and better align care.

Robust payment reforms require effective quality measurement approaches, ensuring reform strategies that balance quality and cost. While there are new models that drive value, reduce cost, and improve quality, many new payment models place more emphasis on the cost of care, potentially putting patients at risk and creating the wrong incentives for the healthcare system. Other models fail to address total cost of care or appropriate use leading to higher costs without the associated improvement in quality. The methodology used to select and put measures together in the payment model may have serious unintended consequences.

For example, who is responsible for the patient's care, or how care is attributed, may not incentivize coordinated care as was originally intended in the payment model. Quality measurement plays a critical role in ensuring new payment approaches focus equally on quality, safety, equity and cost to drive value.

#### **GOAL 5**

##### **Promote the transformation to digital health and support the adoption of digital quality measures.**

NQF will develop a technology framework to ensure that evolving technologies are objectively assessed and demonstrated to improve safe and appropriate outcomes for patients. Telehealth is an immediate, key example of an evolving technology assessed by the framework. NQF will also partner with key stakeholders to increase the use of digital quality measures as a critical element of the measurement architecture, in order to reduce burden that does not add value and improve care.

Shifts in traditional healthcare delivery will accelerate as the consumer burden for healthcare costs increases and the delivery system seeks innovative means to improve access and increase consumer engagement. While wanting to encourage innovation—whether digital health, remote monitoring, artificial intelligence, or precision medicine—the promises of innovations are often unproven or difficult to assess. As an example, use of telehealth has increased significantly since 2019. Because of this, measures are needed to ensure that telehealth is addressing national priorities around quality and safety gaps, improving coordinated care, and being deployed in ways consistent with the evolving evidence base around where it is most useful.

Clinicians, providers, and patients want reliable means to assess technology's evidence-based ability to address priority challenges. A technology evaluation framework encourages consistent



accountability across all actors—both traditional stakeholders as well as new entrants—in addressing cost, quality, safety, and consumer experience priorities.

NQF will strengthen digital health transformation by supporting greater adoption of Digital Quality Measures (dQMs). These originate from sources of health information that are captured and can be transmitted electronically and via interoperable systems. While use of dQMs remains considerably lower than traditional paper-based measures, they are expected to significantly increase in the near future. Digital Quality Measures, especially when connected to clinical decision support and aligned across the health system, can generate more timely feedback for clinicians. In addition, dQMs substantially reduce reporting burden by electronically gathering the data clinicians generate in the normal course of care.

## GOAL 6

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### Close quality gaps for national healthcare priorities through quality measurement and implementation.

NQF will bring together diverse stakeholders to identify the most critical national healthcare priorities, including patient safety, health equity, chronic disease and prevention, and to identify a focused set of measures to address them. Achieving this goal will also require strategies to close gaps by addressing models of care, payment policies, and quality measurement implementation.

NQF will use the national measure architecture throughout this effort.

Critical health priorities, such as chronic disease and prevention, are often areas where significant gaps in quality measurement exist. The lack of measurement makes it difficult to improve quality for the millions affected by these diseases. This is only exacerbated by the lack of focus on health equity and social determinants of health in measures that are available.

NQF will build consensus across disparate groups in order to reduce gaps in quality measurement to improve patient outcomes, reinforcing NQF's position as a preeminent multistakeholder convener.

## HEALTH OF OUR PEOPLE

### GOAL 7

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#### Make NQF a great place to work.

NQF will develop a multi-faceted strategy that demonstrates an investment in its people and culture. As a mission-driven organization where staff are personally motivated and believe in the work, attracting and retaining top talent is essential to NQF's future success and impact. NQF is committed to providing challenging, meaningful, and innovative work and career growth opportunities, promoting strong leadership, and aligning the organization's culture with its stated values.

Organizations are successful because of their people. NQF will intentionally and purposefully invest in its people and culture to develop and sustain a group of high-performing professionals who are passionate about the work and motivated to achieve its mission.

### GOAL 8

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#### Establish and promote leadership development across NQF.

NQF will prioritize the creation of a leadership framework that supports the organization's mission and goals, contributes to thought leadership throughout the healthcare quality ecosystem, integrates leadership development principles into core talent management functions, and provides targeted learning and development opportunities for high-potential talent.

Effective leadership contributes to higher employee satisfaction, increased employee engagement, reduced turnover, and greater productivity. With an impactful leadership program, NQF will develop and position individuals to successfully lead high-performing teams, foster a culture of continuous feedback and career growth, increase strategic thinking and problem-solving, and create a higher level of accountability in leaders.



## GOAL 9

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### Promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) across NQF.

NQF will develop and implement a DEI strategy across the organization. NQF will establish a DEI vision, set clear expectations for what success looks like for the organization, identify and prioritize specific areas of focus for greatest internal impact, and provide opportunities for employee engagement, exposure, and training on DEI-related topics.

As NQF continues to attract people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, offering an inclusive environment and equitable workplace is critical. Focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion is not just the right thing to do. Studies show that diversity can boost the quality of decision-making and that a diverse workplace can encourage people to be “more creative, more diligent, and harder-working.” Studies have also shown that a more diverse staff can foster enhanced innovation.<sup>3</sup>

## HEALTH OF OUR ORGANIZATION

### GOAL 10

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#### Improve long-term sustainability to support NQF’s mission.

Achieving NQF’s mission can only be accomplished through the continued financial sustainability of the organization. NQF will pursue mission-driven growth and improve operational excellence. NQF will also continue to pursue authorization of federal funding from Congress and expand as possible its statutory authorization.

While NQF’s financial health remains strong, increasing positive returns and operational excellence will allow greater investment in mission-driven programs. NQF will build upon best practices and lessons learned as a result of COVID-19 and the remote work environment to strengthen operations and better support staff needs and processes.

### GOAL 11

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#### Grow NQF membership to reflect the diversity of the healthcare quality ecosystem.

NQF will expand its membership to represent the diversity of the healthcare quality ecosystem more fully. Members are the driving force behind NQF’s mission to advance measurable health improvements through true multistakeholder engagement. NQF will take intentional steps to ensure that all in the ecosystem—such as measure developers, community-based organizations, and public and population health experts—have meaningful engagement opportunities.

### GOAL 12

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#### Become a national leader in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in healthcare.

NQF will become a national leader by modeling DEI with its Board, Standing Committees, Workgroups, Technical Expert Panels, and other convenings. Embracing the principles of DEI will empower NQF to more effectively lean into its brand promise of being the place where everyone has a voice in creating healthcare improvements that provide the greatest value to all. As a multistakeholder convener, NQF has a responsibility to bring a broader range of perspectives to the table, inclusive of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic status. It also has a responsibility to ensure that voice is given to those perspectives through interaction that is conscious of bias and intentionally inclusive.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter-nonprofits>

## CONCLUSION

With the adoption of this plan, NQF will turn to implementation and near-term goal setting to build momentum and drive progress. NQF will continue to seek input from our stakeholders and work with funders to ensure adequate resources to execute the plan. NQF approaches the aspirations of this plan with focus and energy—because that is what the healthcare quality ecosystem needs from NQF and, more importantly, what patients, families, and caregivers need from our healthcare system.

## APPENDIX A

### Summary of the Strategic Planning Process and the Stakeholders Involved

A goal of NQF's planning process was to be inclusive of its Board, staff, and key stakeholders. The process began with an NQF Management Team retreat in January 2020 and concluded with the Board's approval of the plan in December 2020. Board meetings in the summer resulted in the identification of seven themes that needed to be covered in the plan:

#### Measure Architecture

#### Digital Health

#### Health Equity

#### Payment Reform

#### Patient-Family Engagement

#### High Reliability Culture

#### Chronic Disease Burden

Seven Theme Workgroups were established, made up of NQF Board Members, to identify the key issues and concerns as well as NQF's role.

In its entirety the NQF strategic planning process involved individual interviews with members of the NQF Board, thirteen Theme Workgroup meetings, twenty external stakeholder interviews, four Management Team retreats, and two meetings with NQF staff. The results of the meetings and interviews informed the final plan.

The following stakeholders provided input to or feedback on the NQF 5-Year Strategic Plan:

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### Board Members

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Jonathan Perlin MD, PhD (Chair)  
President, Clinical Operations and Chief Medical Officer  
HCA Healthcare

Cristie Upshaw Travis (Vice Chair)  
Chief Executive Officer  
Memphis Business Group on Health

Lewis G. Sandy, MD, FACP (Treasurer)  
Executive Vice President  
Clinical Advancement  
UnitedHealth Group

Adam Thompson (Secretary)  
Regional Partner Director  
South Jersey AIDS Education and Training Center  
Jefferson Health Foundation New Jersey

Susan Frampton, PhD  
President  
Planetree

Martha "Meg" Gaines, JD, LLM  
Former Distinguished Clinical Professor of Law  
Director, Center for Patient Partnerships  
University of Wisconsin Law School

Garth Graham, MD, MPH, FACP, FACC  
Vice President of Community Health, CVS Health  
President, Aetna Foundation

Lance Lang, MD FAAFP  
Chief Medical Officer  
Covered California

Kameron Matthews, MD, JD, FAAFP  
Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services  
Veteran's Health Administration

Carolyn Pare  
Former President & Chief Executive Officer  
Minnesota Health Action Group

Shannon Phillips, MD, MPH, FAAP, SFHM  
Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, Community  
Based Care  
President, Intermountain Medical Group  
Intermountain Healthcare

Jack Resneck, Jr., MD  
Professor and Vice-Chair of Dermatology  
UCSF School of Medicine  
Core Faculty, Institute for Health Policy Studies  
UCSF Secretary  
Board of Trustees, American Medical Association

Knitasha Washington, DHA, FACHE  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
ATW Health Solutions

Lisa Woods  
Senior Director, Strategy and Design US Benefits  
Walmart, Inc.

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#### **Board Member – Ex Officio (Voting)**

Shantanu Agrawal, MD  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
National Quality Forum

Thomas E. Kottke, MD, MSPH  
Chair, Consensus Standards Approval Committee  
Medical Director for Well-being HealthPartners  
Senior Investigator, HealthPartners Institute

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#### **Board Member - Federal Government Members**

##### *Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality*

Jeff Brady, MD, MPH  
Director, Center for Quality Improvement and Patient  
Safety

##### *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

Peter A. Briss, MD, MPH  
U.S. Public Health Service Medical Director  
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and  
Health Promotion

##### *Health Resources and Services Administration*

John Snyder, MD, MS, MPH (FACP)  
Chief Medical Officer  
HRSA Office of Planning, Analysis, and Evaluation

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#### **Board Member - Federal Government Members (Non-Voting)**

##### *Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*

Pierre Yong, MD, MPH, MS,  
Director Division of All-Payer Models  
Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation

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#### **NQF Management Team**

Shantanu Agrawal, MD  
President and CEO

Kathleen Giblin  
Senior Vice President  
Quality Innovation

Sheri Winsper  
Senior Vice President  
Quality Measurement

Amol Batra  
General Counsel

Apryl Clark  
Chief of Staff

Tony Meoni  
Vice President  
Information Technology

Kevin Pettit  
Vice President  
Accounting & Finance

Jonathan Sullivan  
Vice President  
Product and Membership Design

Frances Woodard  
Vice President  
People and Culture

Alejandra Herr  
Senior Managing Director  
Quality Innovation

Kim Ibarra  
Managing Director  
Quality Innovation

Wunmi Isijola  
Senior Managing Director  
Quality Measurement

Sai Ma  
Managing Director  
Quality Measurement

Maha Taylor  
Managing Director  
Quality Measurement

## **NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM**

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Driven by science, collaboration, measurement, and innovation to make care better for all people, National Quality Forum helps drive multiple perspectives into actions that create measurable impact. We are the place where everyone has an equal voice in creating healthcare improvements that provide the greatest value to all. National Quality Forum does what nobody can do alone—but what everyone can accomplish through healthy collaboration on improving outcomes.

### **OUR MISSION**

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To be the trusted  
voice driving measurable  
health improvements

### **OUR VISION**

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Every person experiences  
high value care and  
optimal health outcomes

### **OUR VALUES**

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Collaboration ·  
Leadership · Passion ·  
Excellence · Integrity