 Aligned Innovation Project Update

## Overview

Aligned Innovation was launched by the National Quality Forum (NQF) in October 2022 with a vision to revolutionize healthcare measurement. This initiative leverages a diverse, purpose-driven coalition of stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, aiming to streamline the development and implementation of healthcare measures. Today, criticisms of the quality measurement ecosystem abound, including views that there are too many measures, that we fail to measure what's most important to patients and clinicians, that the measurement process is too burdensome and the measure development process takes too long. Designed to complete the end-to-end process of new measure development under a rapid 24-month cycle, this initiative focuses on producing validated and broadly socialized health outcome measures that are ready for widespread adoption and use.

In our first cycle of work, the Aligned Innovation Coalition identified maternal health and behavioral health outcomes as the two highest priority gap areas in quality measurement. NQF elicited input from patients and clinicians with experience in these areas to elicit from them the outcomes that matter most. These led us to outcome measure concepts for new measure development, which were then further refined by NQF, the Aligned Innovation Coalition and our [Multistakeholder Advisory Council. Progress on the development and testing of these measures is summarized](https://jointcommission.sharepoint.com/:p:/r/sites/AlignedInnovation/Shared%20Documents/Comms-Marketing/MAC%20-%20For%20Website.pptx?d=w90b1473df8a843feb312936500ad1dd4&csf=1&web=1&e=f0s1Wj) below.

## Cycle 1 Initiatives

**Maternal Hypertension Measure**

Objective: To develop a robust measure for monitoring and managing blood pressure during pregnancy and postpartum to mitigate risks of maternal and fetal morbidity and mortality and improve maternal health outcomes. measures of blood pressure control that are in widespread use (e.g., NQF #0018 Controlling High Blood Pressure) exclude pregnant patients due to different blood pressure thresholds that are appropriate during pregnancy and postpartum. Yet complications of hypertension during and after pregnancy are leading drivers of poor maternal outcomes and of racial disparities in maternal health outcomes. A measure of blood pressure control that accounts for these different thresholds during pregnancy and postpartum is a priority gap in our nation’s portfolio of measures.

Progress: NQF convened an expert panel consisting of clinicians, technologists, and advocates. They provided input on a measure concepts of optimal blood pressure control during and after pregnancy, integrating various clinical guidelines and considering different blood pressure control thresholds identified for different stages and segments of the pregnant population. Measure testing in a robust national dataset, with over 10 million prenatal encounters, will begin in summer of 2024. A fully validated electronic clinical quality measure (eCQM) is expected to be complete by the end of 2024.

**Risk-Appropriate Care**

Objective: The second maternal health measure concept that the Coalition identified this cycle examines whether pregnant patients with known risk factors for severe maternal morbidity (SMM) deliver at a facility that is equipped to treat and manage those risk factors. This is a concept known as “risk appropriate care (RAC).” The Coalition prioritized this important work because experts have indicated that increasing the percent of patients with known risk factors who deliver in facilities with the required care capabilities is one of the best available levers to reduce rates of SMM in the US. Preliminary research suggests that this occurs roughly half of the time for patients with known significant risk factors. However, there have been no national estimates of the percentage of patients with significant risk factors who receive RAC, nor information on state and regional differences or differences by population subgroups. Unlike the other measures emerging from Aligned Innovation, this indicator will not be ready for use in an accountability program. There are several reasons for this – but an important one is that to measure risk appropriate care with precision, we will need verified information about each hospital's level of maternal care capabilities. Today, no such hospital-specific information on levels of maternal care capabilities exists.

Progress: The development of the Risk-Appropriate Care interim measure is a collaborative effort, drawing on insights from experts and key stakeholder segments, including clinicians, patients, and public health experts. With input from maternal and fetal medicine experts, we will identify a set of risk factors known to require advanced care capabilities and will examine the extent to which individuals with these risk factors delivered in a facility with the necessary care capabilities. Analyses will leverage a national birthing claims data set encompassing more than 3 million births over a four-year period, this analysis will allow us to identify patterns in RAC rates across geography, rurality, and race, and to use those patterns to assist with policy decisions. This interim measure is essential for understanding and addressing disparities in maternal care and outcomes.

**Behavioral Health Measure**

Objective: To create a patient-reported outcome performance measure (PRO-PM) that evaluates outcomes of depression and anxiety care, including changes in symptoms and function, using previously validated item-content. Existing endorsed measures used to evaluate depression outcomes focus on symptom alleviation, but not on improved function. The combination of improved symptoms and function were highlighted by patients and clinicians as the ultimate goal of care for depression and anxiety. This measure seeks to fill those gaps by creating omnibus tools that include item content to assess both symptoms and function – different tools per age group - and by building a measure of longitudinal change. This tool will aid in managing depression and anxiety in children, adolescents, and adults, across ambulatory healthcare settings, irrespective of treatment modality and will be available as an eCQM.

Progress: NQF convened a multistakeholder expert panel and has recruited a diverse testbed of clinical practices to administer the PROMs that will be used to build the PRO-PM. Historically, implementation challenges have been a principal barrier to PROM adoption. To mitigate these challenges, NQF partnered with PatientIQ, a health information technology platform, to support test sites with implementation and streamline standardized data collection. This project has progressed through phases of preliminary specification and stakeholder feedback, integrating insights from patients and healthcare providers to refine the measure. We will begin collecting data in late June 2024 and plan to complete the project by July of 2025.

**Summary**

By fostering prospective alignment among stakeholders on the highest priority gaps in our nation’s portfolio of measures, we can develop impactful quality measures that are operationally and clinically strong in a 2-year cycle. By focusing on significant health issues like maternal hypertension and behavioral health, Aligned Innovation aims to enhance the effectiveness and equity of healthcare across the nation.

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