

InFOCUS

Advancing the Development and Implementation of Behavioral Health Quality Measures

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The Affordable Care Act promotes performance measurement and quality improvement in all areas of health care. Given the prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders, there is an urgent need for measures that assess the quality and outcomes of behavioral health services. These measures can be used to hold providers, health plans, states, and other entities accountable for providing appropriate and effective care.

Mathematica Policy Research is a national leader in the development of behavioral health quality measures. The measures we have developed focus on a range of populations and health care settings, and they rely on a variety of data sources, including claims, medical records, electronic health records, and patient and provider surveys. Much of our measure development work has been in collaboration with the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA). We work with our clients to prioritize measure concepts, develop and test measure specifications, and implement measurement and quality improvement strategies. Many of the measures we developed have been endorsed by the National Quality Forum and are used in major national and state quality-reporting programs, including the Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) and the Adult Medicaid Core Set. Our work has been supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Measures for health plans. Health plans have a responsibility to ensure that their members receive appropriate care. Individuals with behavioral health conditions require especially close monitoring given their increased risk of comorbid health conditions and premature mortality. Mathematica and NCQA developed a suite of measures for health plans that assess whether individuals with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders receive screening and care for high body mass index, tobacco use, unhealthy alcohol use, diabetes, and hypertension. The Mathematica-NCQA team has also developed several measures for health plan reporting that assess the receipt of follow-up care after discharge

from emergency departments and hospitals. All of these measures are designed to provide health plans and other stakeholders with information that can be used to target quality-improvement efforts. The measures use data from claims and medical records. Mathematica and NCQA worked with health plans to test the feasibility of implementing the measure specifications and gathered information on the reliability and validity of the measures. The team's work has also involved engaging a wide range of stakeholders—consumers, providers, state agencies, health plans, and others—to understand the implementation challenges associated with these measures and develop strategies to overcome them.

Measures for inpatient psychiatric facilities and residential treatment.

Individuals with mental health and substance use disorders need access to safe and appropriate inpatient care during times of crisis. The Mathematica-NCQA team has developed measures for the CMS Inpatient Psychiatric Facility Quality Reporting (IPFQR) program that assess whether hospitalized individuals receive appropriate and timely screening for risk of suicide, risk of becoming violent, substance abuse, and metabolic disorders. The team also developed measures that use claims data to assess whether individuals discharged from inpatient psychiatric facilities receive timely follow-up care in the community. The team has worked closely with inpatient psychiatric facilities and other stakeholders to examine how these measures perform when implemented across different types of private and public psychiatric facilities.

In work for the Department of Veterans Affairs, Mathematica developed metrics to assess whether psychiatric residential treatment facilities provide high quality care. At over 100 facilities, we conducted on-site quality assessments that involved medical record reviews, staff surveys, and observation of the treatment environment. We then worked with program administrators to help them identify quality improvement strategies.

Measures for psychosocial care. Many individuals with mental health and substance use disorders require a range of psychosocial services and supports to live independently, but there are few well-tested measures to monitor the accessibility, quality, or outcomes of such care. In an initial effort to advance the measurement of psychosocial care, Mathematica and NCQA wrote a white paper that described the strengths and limitations of various measurement strategies and proposed the type of infrastructure necessary to facilitate future measures.¹ The Mathematica-NCQA team is also developing and pre-testing a measure of the delivery of evidence-based psychotherapy for adults with post-traumatic stress disorder. A group of clinicians, clinical supervisors, and consumers will pre-test the measure.

Valid and reliable behavioral health quality measures are essential to give policymakers, program administrators, and the broader public actionable information that can improve care. In a rapidly changing health care system, such measures can provide information necessary for monitoring the impacts of policy changes and health care reforms. Mathematica's work is building the foundation for a more comprehensive approach to measuring and improving the quality and outcomes of services for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders.

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¹ Brown, Jonathan, Sarah Hudson Scholle, and Melissa Azur. "Strategies for Measuring the Quality of Psychotherapy: A White Paper to Inform Measure Development and Implementation." Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, May 15, 2014. Available at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/2014/QualPsy.cfm>.



MEASURES for health plans

Developed measures that assess whether individuals with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders receive screening and care for high body mass index, tobacco use, unhealthy alcohol use, diabetes, and hypertension.



MEASURES for inpatient psychiatric facilities

Developed measures that assess whether hospitalized individuals receive appropriate and timely screening for suicide, risk of becoming violent, substance abuse, and metabolic disorders.



MEASURES for psychosocial care

Described the strengths and limitations of various measurement strategies and proposed the type of infrastructure necessary to facilitate future measures. Also developing a measure for the delivery of psychotherapy for post-traumatic stress disorder.

