

# Using Data to Improve Service Delivery: Continuous Quality Improvement

## About the Core Topic

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a structured approach to quality that uses data to improve organizational systems, processes, service delivery, and outcomes. It is a form of process improvement in which an individual or team sets a goal for improvement, enacts a change, measures the effect of the change, and repeats this process until the goal is met.

## Why This Topic Matters for Implementation

CQI ensures that effective programs and practices are integrated, maintained, and continuously improved within an organization. By focusing on systematic processes, data-driven decisions, collaboration, and ongoing evaluation, CQI enables organizations to ensure programs and practices are implemented with fidelity, embedded into daily operations, and used to enhance service quality and long-term success.

## Key Components

- **Leadership Commitment and Support:** Leaders must champion the CQI vision and assess their organization's readiness and capacity for quality improvement. Leadership activities that support CQI include allocating resources and building a CQI infrastructure that honors front line staff expertise and communicates CQI efforts and priorities throughout the organization.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** In CQI, data such as key performance indicators and patient outcomes are used to guide organizational decisions and improvement efforts. Staff are key partners in gathering, reviewing, and analyzing data and may need data tools and training.
- **Employee Engagement and Collaboration:** Leaders can further engage staff by sharing open and transparent communication around CQI activities. Successful CQI approaches have a process for collecting and integrating staff feedback to support effective problem solving and improvement projects.
- **Client Focus:** All team members should learn about, collaborate with, and involve clients in CQI activities. Involvement may include gathering and integrating client feedback and prioritizing initiatives that enhance client satisfaction and outcomes.

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- **Structured Frameworks and Approaches:** There are many well-tested CQI models, structures, and processes, including PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) cycles, tools for change (e.g., nominal group technique, walkthroughs), Six Sigma,<sup>1</sup> or the Lean<sup>2</sup> methodology.
- **Focus on Systemic Change:** Organizations with strong CQI programs spend time reviewing processes and systems to identify and address the root causes of problems and how they impact the client experience. Even after improving a process, these teams work to reduce variability to ensure sustainable improvement on an ongoing basis.
- **Sustainability:** One way CQI practices become embedded into organizational culture is through ongoing training including new staff orientation to CQI and ongoing all staff training and engagement in the development, management, and implementation of improvement projects.
- **Innovation and Adaptability:** Sometimes an idea for the best way to improve a process may come from an unexpected source or be enabled by a new technological advancement. Being open to creative CQI solutions can help organizations evolve and adapt to new challenges.

## How We Can Help

### WHAT WE CAN DO

- Assist you in developing and implementing CQI plans for your organization
- Support you to adopt a standardized CQI approach across the entire organization
- Provide technical assistance for prioritizing a QI agenda
- Provide coaching and consultation for CQI leaders to build their skill set
- Hold Training of Trainers (ToT) opportunities to build internal expertise
- Organize a community of practice or learning collaborative for sharing best practices
- Review existing CQI plans and provide recommendations
- Share standardized tools to help implement CQI principles

#### References:

1. Black, J., & Miller, D. (2008). *The Toyota way to healthcare excellence: Increase efficiency and improve quality with Lean*. Health Administration Press.
2. Black, K., & Revere, L. (2006). Six Sigma arises from the ashes of TQM with a twist. *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance Incorporating Leadership in Health Services*, 19(2-3), 259-266.

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## SUPPORT WE HAVE PROVIDED

- We held a NIATx Change Leader Academy on Process Improvement Tools to Achieve Your CQI Goals. Participants learned to apply NIATx quality improvement principles, lead change teams, and improve processes. Participants noted improvements in communication, strategic thinking, process flow, and community engagement. NIATx was integrated into grant sustainability planning, and CQI components were included in efforts to reintroduce universal screening.
- We hosted a learning session that included a general overview of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), its importance for behavioral health organizations, and the different orientation between CQI and quality assurance.

## Key Resources

These practical resources are designed to help you move from planning to action:

- ***[NIATx Workbook: An Introduction to the NIATx Model of Process Improvement](#)***. Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment (NIATx).
- ***[NIATx: Easy and Powerful Process Improvement for Behavioral Health](#)***. Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment (NIATx).
- ***[Quality Improvement Strategy Pt 1: Tools to Make and Measure Improvement](#)***. Safety Net Medical Home Initiative.

To view recorded learning sessions and online courses focused on continuous quality improvement and our other core topics, visit the **[CMHIS Learning Lab](#)**.



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