Q1. What is a Quality Improvement Plan?

A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) is a formal, documented set of commitments that a health care organization makes to its patients/clients/residents, staff and community to improve quality through focused targets and actions. QIPs are used in many sectors to assist organizations in delivering quality programs and services.

Q2. What does a QIP aim to achieve for health care organizations, patients/clients/residents, and the broader health care system?

A QIP is owned by the health care organization and is a way for that organization to focus its efforts on key quality improvement priorities.

Health care organizations may be undertaking a range of quality improvement projects at any given time. Organizations should consider system-, sector-, and organization-level quality improvement priorities when developing their annual QIPs. The QIP helps to organize quality improvement projects, prioritize them, and makes sure they’re aligned with the overall quality improvement goals of the organization and system at large.

QIPs are also a way for patients/clients/residents to become engaged in a dialogue about the quality of care provided by health care organizations. Patients/clients/residents, their families and caregivers should have access to an organization’s QIP (e.g., through public posting), feel they can ask questions about the QIP, and contribute to the QIP development process (e.g., by filling out an experience survey or through an organization’s patient relations process).

Finally, QIPs are a way for the entire health care system to collectively focus on key priorities that will help to put patients, residents, and clients first. By setting priority indicators and publishing QIP guidance materials, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (ministry) is supporting a focus on broader health system improvement and shared improvement priorities.

Q3. What is the objective for QIPs?

Every organization will be at a different starting point when it comes to developing a QIP. The guidance materials have been developed to ensure that every health care organization completing a QIP can “see themselves” in the system-level commitments and priorities expressed in this guidance.

While the QIPs are not used as a performance management tool between the ministry (or LHIN) and healthcare organizations, they are meant to be a mechanism through which an organization’s leadership holds the organization to account for the commitments made for improved quality of care. Organizations have a responsibility to report on progress and be available to explain their performance on commitments made in their QIP. The QIP progress report is one means by which organizations can account for progress made against their commitments.
Q4. Who needs to develop a QIP?

The following organizations are required to develop and submit QIPs to Health Quality Ontario (HQO) by April 1 of every year:

- All public hospitals in Ontario
- Inter-professional team-based primary care models - specifically, Family Health Teams (FHT), Nurse Practitioner-led clinics (NPLC), Community Health Centres (CHC), and Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHAC)
- Community Care Access Centres (CCAC), beginning in 2014
- Long-term care (LTC) homes, beginning in 2015. LTC homes are encouraged to submit QIPs to HQO by April 1, 2014.

HQO is able to receive QIP submissions by April 1 each year. There is no flexibility with the April 1 submission deadline.

Q5. How do I submit my QIP to HQO?

Hospitals and primary care organizations are to submit their QIPs through HQO’s QIP Navigator. The navigator is an online platform that allows organizations to develop and submit their QIPs annually. Within the Navigator, HQO will pre-populate organizations’ performance for indicators where such information is available (e.g., from the Canadian Institute for Health Information or the ministry). This data will be available in February 2014.

The Navigator is currently available for hospitals and primary care organizations only; in the future, CCACs and LTC homes will also be able to submit their QIPs through the QIP Navigator. For now, CCACs and LTC homes should submit their QIPs to HQO at QIP@hqontario.ca, using the standardized templates available on the MOHLTC website.

Q6. Does the ministry also need to receive a copy of my QIP?

Organizations do not need to submit their plans to the ministry.

Q7. What is the role of the LHINs in the QIP process?

Broadly, as the entities responsible for planning, integrating, and funding local health services, LHINs work together with health care organizations to identify and address opportunities for quality improvement.

Where organizations are required to submit QIPs as part of a LHIN requirement (e.g., CHCs, CCACs, and LTC homes), the LHINs are responsible for ensuring that these organizations submit their QIPs accordingly.

Hospitals, as a requirement of the Excellent Care for All Act, 2010, should provide a draft of their plan at the request of their LHIN.
**Q8. What priority areas should my organization focus on in our QIP?**

The **Indicator Technical Specifications** document that is an accompaniment the *Quality Improvement Plan Guidance Document for Ontario’s Health Care Organizations* outline a set of priority QIP indicators for each sector. Priority indicators were selected based on demonstrated alignment to shared, cross-sectoral efforts to improve safer transitions of care, patient/client/resident experience, and improved access for Ontarians. Achieving system-wide change in these areas requires every sector and every organization to prioritize quality improvement.

Organizations are expected to review the priority indicators for their sector and determine which are relevant for their organization. To support this process, your organization should **review its current performance against provincial benchmarks/theoretical best for all priority indicators**. If your organization elects not to include a priority indicator in the QIP (for example, because performance already meets or exceeds the benchmark/theoretical best), then this should be documented in the comments section of the QIP Workplan. **Any additional indicators can also be included** in your QIP as relevant to your organization’s quality improvement goals. HQO provides **additional resources** to support selection of indicators for your QIP.

For example, when developing QIPs, **hospitals** must consider satisfaction survey results, as well as patient relations and critical incident data. In addition, hospital QIPs must include annual performance improvement targets, justification for the targets that have been set, and a description of how the achievement of targets is linked to executive compensation. Other health care organizations should also consider incorporating these aspects to ensure a strong quality improvement program.

**Q9. Who in my organization is responsible for developing a QIP?**

The **Board** of the health care organization is ultimately accountable for organizational governance and should set direction and approve the QIP. Board members need to be involved in overseeing the development and review of the QIP.

It is expected that organizations will bring the appropriate **patient/client/resident** perspectives into the development of a QIP. The involvement of patients/clients/residents in organizational priority setting is important to ensuring quality goals reflect the needs of the community.

The **Quality Committee**, where one exists, also has an important role to play in the development of the QIP, identification of priorities, and review of performance data. Some sectors, including hospitals as per ECFAA, are required to have Quality Committees as part of their organization. The Quality Committee should report to the board regarding QIP development and progress throughout the year. For more information about establishing a Quality Committee, refer to the ministry’s website.

For guidance on how other members of the organization should be involved in the QIP, refer to the *Quality Improvement Plan Guidance Document for Ontario’s Health Care Organizations.*
Q10. What does HQO do with the QIPs once they are submitted?

HQO conducts a provincial, comparative analysis of the QIPs on an annual basis. This analysis helps to inform where quality improvement efforts are being focused and where improvements need to be made. This analysis is a critical lever in helping to continue to drive system-level change. HQO conducts analysis of submitted QIPs in an effort to share knowledge and best practices related to QIPs.

The ministry looks to HQO’s analysis to understand how organizations are using their QIPs to drive improvement efforts and to understand general trends across priority indicators and cross-sector efforts to achieve quality targets.

Q11. Can I make changes to my QIP after it has been submitted to HQO?

Organization can make updates to their QIPs after submission by April 1st for their own improvement purposes. However, any changes that are made to a QIP after the deadline are not required to be submitted to HQO and will not be included in provincial-level analysis.

For organizations that publicly post their QIPs, it is recommended that the most current version of their plan be posted and that any changes are viewable by the public. Refer to Question 15 for more information about publicly posting your QIP.

Should an organization have an error in their QIP they wish to correct, it is suggested that they contact HQO at QIP@hqontario.ca.

Q12. My organization already has a QIP. Can I just submit that?

The QIP as set out by the ministry and supported by HQO provides a standardized way of structuring your organization’s quality improvement goals and targets aligned with the Model for Improvement (Langley GL, Nolan KM, Nolan TW, Norman CL, Provost LP Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance (2nd Edition). San Francisco, California, USA: Jossey-Bass Publishers; 2009). The format allows for comparative analysis, and helps to ensure all system partners are working toward the same system-level goals and priorities. Other quality improvement plans can be used as a basis to inform the development of the QIP, ensuring that required components and sections are completed.

The format provided by the ministry is to be used for the development of your QIP. Visit the ministry’s website to access this material.

Q13. Will quality improvement targets be set for my organization? What happens if my organization doesn’t meet the targets set out in our QIP?

Health care organizations set their own quality improvement targets within their QIPs. For advice on how to set appropriate targets, please see the section on Provincial Priorities and Success Factors in the Quality Improvement Plan Guidance Document for Ontario’s Health Care Organizations on the ministry’s website. Health care organizations can also look to Health Quality Ontario for additional resources and information. Established targets or benchmarks may also exist and can be used to guide target setting.
QIPs are not an accountability or compliance tool between the funder and the recipient (health care organization), but rather a tool to guide an organization’s quality improvement efforts. The content of QIPs will not be used to determine or adjust funding levels; however, it is important to remember that a QIP is a formal commitment that an organization makes to its patients/residents/clients, staff, and community to improve quality through focused targets and actions. To deliver on this commitment, all organizations should be striving to achieve the targets they set out for themselves.

The Boards of all health care organizations may consider using QIPs as a way of holding their organization accountable to targets that have been set in the QIPs. For example, as per the Excellent Care for All Act, 2010, hospitals are required to establish targets in their QIPs that are linked to executive compensation.

**Q14. Is my organization required to publicly post its QIP?**

Not only is transparency an important way of ensuring that our publicly-funded health care system remains accountable to the people of Ontario, it is also a way for health care organizations to foster dialogue with the communities they serve. By publicly posting their QIPs, health care organizations can communicate local quality improvement priorities to patients, clients, and residents and demonstrate their overall commitment to quality.

Hospitals and CCACs are required to publicly post their QIPs. LTC homes will be required to post their QIPs beginning in 2015. In support of transparency, primary care organizations are also strongly encouraged to post their QIPs.

**Q15. If I need help with my QIP, who do I contact?**

The following resources should be accessed to help to answer any questions about your QIP:
- Questions about legislative and/or policy requirements related to the development of the QIPs, or broader Excellent Care for All Act (ECFAA) questions should be directed to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care at ECFAA@ontario.ca
- For questions about completing a QIP, including questions about the QIP Navigator, please contact Health Quality Ontario at QIP@HQOntario.ca.