

## For More Information

A detailed description of AHRQ's current initiatives may be found in the *AHRQ Accountability Report* (AHRQ Pub. No. 02-0008).

This publication can be ordered without charge from the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse by phone (800-358-9295) or E-mail (ahrqpubs@ahrq.gov).

For more information about AHRQ and its programs and activities, visit AHRQ's Web site at [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov).

## Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality



*Quality Research for Quality Health Care*



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[www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

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## What Is **AHRQ**

**AHRQ is...** the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality— the Nation's lead Federal agency for research on health care quality, costs, outcomes, and patient safety.

- The health services research arm of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), complementing the biomedical research mission of its sister agency, the National Institutes of Health.
- Home to research centers that specialize in major areas of health care research:
  - Quality improvement and patient safety
  - Outcomes and effectiveness of care
  - Clinical practice and technology assessment
  - Health care organization and delivery systems
  - Primary care (including preventive services)
  - Health care costs and sources of payment

- A major source of funding and technical assistance for health services research and research training at leading U.S. universities and other institutions.
- A science partner, working with the public and private sectors to build the knowledge base for what works – and does not work – in health and health care and to translate this knowledge into everyday practice and policymaking.

### What is health services research?

*Health services research* examines how people get access to health care, how much care costs, and what happens to patients as a result of this care. The main goals of health services research are to identify the most effective ways to organize, manage, finance, and deliver high-quality care; reduce medical errors; and improve patient safety.

# AHRQ's Goals



## *AHRQ supports improvements in **health outcomes** by:*

- Supporting researchers and **research networks** that address concerns of very high public priority, such as health disparities, drugs and other therapeutics, primary care practice, and integrated health care delivery systems.
- Supporting projects that test and evaluate successful methods that **translate research into practice** to improve patient care in diverse health care settings.
- Supporting **Evidence-based Practice Centers** that review and synthesize scientific evidence for conditions or technologies that are costly, common, or important to the Medicare or Medicaid programs.
- Translating the recommendations of the **U.S. Preventive Services Task Force** into resources for providers, patients, and health care systems.

## *AHRQ develops strategies to strengthen **quality measurement and improvement** by:*

- Supporting more than 90 projects in a multi-year effort to **improve patient safety**, including:
  - Identifying factors that put patients at risk.
  - Using computers and other information technology to reduce and prevent errors.

- Developing innovative approaches that reduce errors and improve safety in various health care settings and geographically diverse locations.
- Disseminating research results and improving patient safety education and training for clinicians and other providers.

- Overseeing the operations of the **Patient Safety Task Force**, an HHS effort to integrate research, data collection, and analysis of medical errors and promote interagency collaboration in reducing the number of injuries resulting from these errors.
- Providing hospitals, health data organizations, and States with enhanced **quality assessment tools** that they can use with their own hospital administrative data to highlight potential quality concerns and track changes over time in three areas: ambulatory care sensitive conditions, inpatient quality (volume, mortality, and resource use), and patient safety.

## *AHRQ identifies strategies to improve **health care access**, foster appropriate use, and reduce unnecessary **expenditures** by:*

- Supporting research on ways to **reduce health care disparities** especially for women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, the terminally ill, racial/ethnic minorities, and residents of inner cities and rural areas.
- Conducting an **ongoing nationwide survey** of about 15,000 households each year that helps researchers and policymakers learn

more about how Americans use and pay for their health care.

- Working in partnership with 25 States and the health care industry to build a **multi-State health data system** to inform research and decisionmaking at Federal, State, and community levels.

- Providing financial support and technical assistance to researchers examining how the organizational and financial features of the U.S. health insurance and health care delivery systems can improve health care access and quality for the Nation's **low-income children**.

## How AHRQ Research Helps People

### *AHRQ research helps...*

#### *patients and other consumers:*

- AHRQ's research assists people in getting objective information on how to choose health plans, doctors, or hospitals based on their performance.
- Personal health guides help individuals keep track of their preventive care and other health services they receive.

#### *physicians and other health care providers:*

- Findings from AHRQ research help practitioners diagnose and treat patients more effectively. A computerized clinical information system developed with AHRQ support is now used to determine the most appropriate timing for giving antibiotics to surgical patients.
- Investigators in an AHRQ-funded study devised a special imaging test that has helped hospitals reduce inappropriate hospitalizations for patients with chest pain, thereby reducing unnecessary costs.
- The National Guideline Clearinghouse™ gives clinicians, health plans, health care delivery systems, and purchasers a free, Web-based mechanism for obtaining objective, detailed information on clinical practice guidelines.

#### *public policymakers and other health officials:*

- AHRQ gives information and technical assistance to State and local policymakers through user-driven workshops on topics that include improving care delivered to children served by State agencies and developing strategies to reduce health disparities.