

## AHRQ: Advancing Excellence in Health Care

The mission of AHRQ is to improve the quality, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care by:

- Using evidence to improve health care.
- Improving health care outcomes through research.
- Transforming research into practice.

AHRQ, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, is dedicated to improving the quality, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. It is 1 of 12 agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Working with the public and private sectors, AHRQ builds the knowledge base for what works—and does not work—in health and health care and translates this knowledge into everyday practice and policymaking.

AHRQ's focus areas are:

**Comparing the effectiveness of treatments.** AHRQ's patient-centered outcomes research improves health care quality by providing patients and physicians with state-of-the-science information on which medical treatments work best for a given condition. Comparisons of drugs, medical devices, tests, surgeries, and ways to deliver health care can help patients and their families understand

what treatments work best and how their risks and side effects compare. AHRQ initiatives include:

- The John M. Eisenberg Center for Clinical Decisions and Communications Science that translates comparative effectiveness reviews and research reports created by AHRQ's Effective Health Care Program into guides and tools for consumers, clinicians, and policymakers.
- 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.
- The Centers for Education and Research on Therapeutics that conduct research and provide education to advance the optimal use of drugs, biologicals, and medical devices.



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- The Developing Evidence to Inform Decisions about Effectiveness Network of research-based health organizations that conduct practical studies about the outcomes, comparative clinical effectiveness, safety, and appropriateness of health care items and services.

**Quality improvement and patient safety.** AHRQ funds and disseminates research that identifies the root causes of threats to patient safety, provides information on the scope and impact of medical errors, and examines effective ways to make system-level changes to help prevent errors. AHRQ initiatives include:

- Preventing health care-associated infections.
- Medical liability reform.
- Patient Safety Organizations, which collect and analyze patient safety events that health care providers report and provide feedback to help clinicians and health care organizations improve health care quality.
- TeamSTEPPS® (Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety), an evidence-based teamwork system designed to improve communication and teamwork skills among health care professionals.
- Patient safety culture assessment tools that hospitals, nursing homes, and medical offices use to assess their patient safety culture, track changes in patient safety over time, and evaluate the impact of specific patient safety interventions.

**Health information technology.**

AHRQ's health information technology (health IT) initiative is part of the Nation's strategy to put technology to work in health care. AHRQ provides support to promote access to and encourage the adoption of health IT.

The broad mission of AHRQ's health IT initiative is to improve the quality of health care for all Americans. The Agency has focused its health IT activities on the following three goals:

- Improve health care decisionmaking.
- Support patient-centered care.
- Improve the quality and safety of medication management.

**Prevention and care management.**

AHRQ translates evidence-based knowledge into recommendations for clinical preventive services to improve the health of all Americans. AHRQ initiatives include:

- The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel of nationally renowned, non-Federal experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that assesses the benefits and harms of preventive services and makes recommendations about which preventive services should be incorporated routinely into primary care practice.
- The Patient-Centered Medical Home, a model to improve health care by transforming how primary care is organized and delivered to ensure that care is patient-centered, comprehensive, accessible, coordinated across the health care system, and uses a systems-based approach to quality and safety.

- The Practice-Based Research Network that rapidly develops and assesses methods and tools to ensure that new scientific evidence is incorporated into real-world practice settings.

**Health care value.** AHRQ finds ways to achieve greater value in health care by producing the measures, data, tools, evidence, and strategies that health care organizations, systems, insurers, purchasers, and policymakers need to improve the value and affordability of health care. AHRQ initiatives include:

- The Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS), a family of surveys that gather information about families and individuals, their medical providers, and employers across the United States. MEPS is the only national source of annual data on the specific health services that Americans use, how frequently services are used, the cost of services, and the methods of paying for services.
- The Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project (HCUP), a family of health care databases and related software tools and products developed through a Federal-State-industry partnership that serves as a national information resource of patient-level health care data.
- Quality Indicators that highlight potential quality concerns; identify areas that need further study; and track changes over time in prevention, inpatient care, patient safety, and pediatric care.

- The annual *National Healthcare Quality Report* and *National Healthcare Disparities Report* that measure trends in effectiveness of care, patient safety, timeliness of care, patient centeredness, and efficiency of care.
- State Snapshots that provide, via a Web site, State-specific health care quality information, including strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
- The Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems program that develops surveys to help improve the quality of health care from the perspective of consumers and patients.
- The National Guideline Clearinghouse™, a Web-based resource for information on more than 2,500 evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.
- The National Quality Measures Clearinghouse™, a database and Web site for information on specific evidence-based health care quality measures and measure sets.

### For More Information

A detailed description of AHRQ's current initiatives is available in the *AHRQ Annual Highlights, 2011* report, which is available online at <http://www.ahrq.gov/about/highltd1.htm>. For more detailed questions, please call the Agency's public inquiries line at 301-427-1104.





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