

National Critical Access Hospital Quality Inventory and Assessment

State Flex Program Fact Sheet

Background

Over the last year, the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) has been working in partnership with the Flex Monitoring Team (FMT) at the University of Minnesota and Stratis Health to develop the National Critical Access Hospital (CAH) Quality Inventory and Assessment (“Assessment”) pilot.

This Assessment will allow FORHP to learn more about CAH quality improvement (QI) infrastructure and activities, service lines offered, and related quality measures. The Assessment, which is the first of its kind at a national level, will be an opportunity to gather a wealth of information on QI processes from CAHs in a standardized manner, in order to enhance support to CAHs in quality improvement activities.

The goals of the Assessment are to:

- 1) Gather an inventory of hospital service lines and related quality measures to identify trends and help inform Flex initiatives at the state and national levels.
- 2) Assess CAH quality infrastructure to identify gaps and opportunities for enhancement.

Information captured through the Assessment can support quality initiatives at the following levels:

- Hospital-level: Provide state and national comparison information related to quality infrastructure, QI processes, and quality activities and measurement across different CAH service lines.
- State-level: Provide timely, accurate, and useful CAH quality-related information to help inform technical assistance for CAH improvement activities.
- National-level: Provide hospital and state-specific information to help inform the future of MBQIP and national technical assistance and data analytic needs.

Key stakeholders were engaged in creating the Assessment through two convenings:

- 1) An Advisory Group made up of State Flex staff, MBQIP subcontractors, and CAH quality experts provided input on the inventory questions in the Assessment.
- 2) A National CAH Quality Summit brought together additional State Flex staff, MBQIP subcontractors, CAH quality experts, and a FORHP Project Officer to identify key elements of CAH quality infrastructure and criteria to describe those elements. The Summit resulted in a [report](#) that describes the nine core elements of CAH quality infrastructure and related criteria for each element.

Benefit to State Flex Programs

By early 2024, each state Flex program will receive:

- A state-level report
- A spreadsheet with data from all CAHs in the state (via their NIH workspace, where MBQIP reports are delivered)

This information will provide SFPs with a wealth of knowledge about their CAHs, and also provide the opportunity for collaboration with other states. Some examples of ways to use CAH Assessment data include:

- Using service line data to identify CAHs to work with on new projects (e.g., CAHs with swing beds, RHCs, labor and delivery, etc.)
- Using the CAH quality infrastructure data to identify the CAHs in greatest need for developing their quality infrastructure, and/or the greatest quality infrastructure needs across all the CAHs in your state to develop activities and education in these areas.
- Referencing a CAH's Assessment data before orienting a new quality manager and aligning the orientation conversation with the greatest needs/opportunities for improvement for that CAH.
- Utilizing Assessment data to create learning collaboratives among CAHs with similarities, such as the same EHR vendor or service line.
- Utilizing Assessment data to pair hospitals that have opportunities with those that are more advanced in their implementation of quality activities or use of different quality tools.
- Identifying other states with CAHs that may have similar goals or opportunities for improvement (particularly when the number of hospitals in your state is low) to create a cohort for a QI project.
- Prompting conversations with quality contractors for how to best address some of the improvement opportunities identified in the Assessment.

Additionally, the Assessment of the Elements of CAH Quality Infrastructure will be a future measure of the MBQIP program (similar to the Antibiotic Stewardship measure that is a part of the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) annual survey). As a core MBQIP measure, CAHs will be expected to fill out the Assessment annually.

Process for Launching Assessment to CAHs

A link to the Assessment will be sent out to CAHs by State Flex Programs on Monday, September 11. FORHP will provide SFPs with an email template (including the link to the Assessment and other informative recordings), as well as the following resources for CAHs:

- A pdf version of the Assessment, so CAHs can review the questions before filling it out online.
- A detailed instruction document for the Assessment, with links to specific resources that may be helpful in answering questions in the Assessment.
- A CAH Fact Sheet with more information about the Assessment, including links to other informative recordings about the Assessment as well as the Core Elements of CAH Quality Infrastructure.

The Assessment will be administered online via Qualtrics and we expect CAHs will spend approximately 60-90 minutes collecting information and completing the online Assessment. CAHs are encouraged to complete the Assessment with input from a variety of team members, but each CAH should submit only one Assessment. For CAH staff that may work in multiple hospitals, each hospital should submit a separate Assessment. CAHs will receive an email confirmation of their completion of the Assessment (sent to the quality contact listed) which will also include a copy of their responses to the Assessment. These and other details are included in the Assessment instructions for your reference, as well as for the hospital staff.

Later in September SFPs will receive a link to a tracking document to see which of their CAHs have completed the Assessment and be asked to follow up with those who have not completed the Assessment during the Assessment period. FORHP will provide reminder emails throughout the period to prompt your follow-up to your CAHs. The Assessment will close on October 31, 2023.

Additional information about the National CAH Quality Summit and Elements of CAH Quality Infrastructure can be found [here](#). Previous recordings of MBQIP VKGs also include more information about the process of developing the Assessment, and can be found in the [Flex Forum](#).

Any questions about the Assessment (from SFPs or your CAHs) can be directed to Megan Lahr at the Flex Monitoring Team (lahrx074@umn.edu) or to the MBQIP@hrsa.gov inbox. Thank you for your help in this process!