What Is CQI and Why Is It Important?

For the Illinois MIECHV program, Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is the complete process of identifying, describing and analyzing strengths and problems, and then testing, implementing, learning from, and revising solutions. CQI will be an essential component of MIECHV, providing a way of generating meaningful commitments from all levels of the program. The Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at the University of Illinois is leading the MIECHV CQI effort in Illinois.

Our goal is to provide the best possible services to the children and families that we serve, and our CQI plan is intended to improve program implementation and participant outcomes. CQI philosophy is that most things can be improved. Meaningful CQI efforts recognize that one learns as much from challenges and failures as from successes. Through data review and analysis, benchmark data will offer new knowledge about potential challenges with program implementation and inform programs about training and technical assistance needs.

A Culture of Quality in Illinois

A culture of quality is present when data are valued, when programs continually strive for improvement, and optimizing outcomes is the shared vision of all program partners at the local and state levels. Central to this commitment is creating an environment in which all of us strive to meet common goals, understand the targets that we are being measured against, critically assess and reflect on our own performance, share what we have learned, and have accountability to the whole team.

Introducing the Quality Koala

In order to help establish and reinforce a culture of quality within MIECHV, we have developed our CQI mascot, the Quality Koala. CQI is about improving systems and environments in which home visiting takes place, not about focusing on specific individuals, and we hope that this cheeky character will help to dispel any negativity associated with past QA challenges.
Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) vs. Quality Assurance (QA) - What’s the Difference?

Quality assurance (QA) measures compliance with certain necessary standards. Quality improvement is a continuous improvement process. QA normally focuses on individual mistakes, while QI is a proactive approach to improve processes and systems. Standards and measures developed for quality assurance, however, can inform the quality improvement process. The chart below details and categorizes the distinctions between QA and QI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>QA</th>
<th>QI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Measuring compliance with standards</td>
<td>Continuously improving processes to meet standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means</strong></td>
<td>Inspection</td>
<td>Prevention, monitor over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td>Required, defensive</td>
<td>Chosen, proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Outliers or “bad apples”, individuals</td>
<td>Processes, systems, majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Players</strong></td>
<td>Selected departments</td>
<td>Organization wide, benchmarking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disciplines</strong></td>
<td>Within profession</td>
<td>Multidisciplinary approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
<td>Medical profession focused</td>
<td>Patient care focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Illinois MIECHV’s First CQI Meeting**

MIECHV’s first in-person CQI meetings took place on April 19th in Champaign and on April 22nd in Chicago, with at least one MIECHV CQI representative present from each MIECHV provider agency. During the meetings, we discussed:

- Differences between CQI and QA;
- Ideas on how to establish a culture of quality in Illinois home visiting; and
- Roles and responsibilities of all the players.

There are some tasks for all CQI Representatives to complete before our phone conference in July:

- Confirm your agency’s designated MIECHV CQI representative (at least one per agency);
- Take the sample CQI Memorandum of Understanding between MIECHV agencies and CPRD back to your agencies for discussion. Please come back to the next meeting with any suggestions for improvement, and a plan to have an MOU signed.
The CQI process is a cycle that promotes excellence and continuous improvement.

CQI allows home visiting programs to look at their activities and performance, determine whether services meet predetermined outcomes and expectations of quality, and work to correct any observed deficiencies identified through the CQI process.

CQI is different from traditional quality assurance in that it is self-directed and self-determined rather than imposed by an external entity.
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