

# Consider Becoming a Patient-Centered Medical Home

While we have described evaluation activities as a means to demonstrate to your stakeholders the value and impact of your clinic program, the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) presents an opportunity for a clinic to reflect its impact in terms that are widely recognized in the healthcare industry. Administered by the National Committee of Quality Assurance (NCQA), this model of practice, through an emphasis on communication and care coordination, creates a primary care model that places the focus upon the patient and what the individual desires from a relationship with a medical home. The PCMH recognition is the most widely accepted model for transforming primary care practices into medical homes. Research has begun to demonstrate that adoption of PCMH standards can lead to higher quality and lower costs, while improving the patient and provider experiences of care. Also, of importance for the free and charitable clinic sector, select sector clinics from across the country have gained PCMH recognition at the highest levels of attainment, thus demonstrating comparable quality standards with other primary care providers in their communities.

The way for a clinic to address the common question of quality than to measure competitively with common national standards!

## Level of Commitment

Achieving recognition as a patient centered medical home is no small undertaking. The decision to seek PCMH recognition requires a significant commitment of time and resources, typically thousands of dollars and efforts that will extend for a 12–18 month period. It may represent a transformational point in a clinic’s history and development, when priority is given to a patient focus and the provision of demonstrable quality services. While this commitment is unusual for a clinic at its inception, instances of clinic consideration for this program in their first several years of operation are becoming more common. It also represents an investment that many clinics are finding outside support to sustain. Private funding sources are recognizing that through securing this level of recognition, clinics can

demonstrate the quality and impact of their services as measured in terms that are applicable to primary care providers throughout every level of the community.

### Organizational Rigor

Beyond the commitment of time and resources, achieving PCMH status may require significant change at every level of the clinic organization. The adoption of such transformational change requires a degree of organizational stability that should not be under-estimated. While clinics in startup mode may be diligent in preparation to deliver quality services, the early months, and even years, typically bring elements of trial and error. What seems logical and deliverable in theory, prove to be challenging once underway. Individuals who had seemed committed to the long-term success of the project fall by the wayside to be replaced by new core leadership. However, once a degree of stability is attained, PCMH recognition represents the driving force needed to stabilize and insure the future of important clinics in the safety net. In addition, change to existing systems may necessarily mean change in job descriptions and even roles in the new clinic structure. Such institutional change is never easy. Preparation for the organizational stresses of such change should be secured on the part of both the Board and senior clinic leadership.

### External Resources

External resources will be an essential ingredient should a clinic decide to move forward on achieving PCMH recognition. Typically, a clinic retains outside consultant support to guide and support the clinic through the process. A Certified Content Expert holds a credential from NCQA that reflects a level of knowledge and expertise necessary to assist PCMH recognition efforts. When seeking outside assistance, possession of this credential may be an important element in deciding such an investment. Selected clinics have also added administrative staffing to conduct the actual work necessary to prepare the materials and facilitate the changes necessary to adopt the new required practices.

### Keep in Mind

It is important to recognize the benefits that may come from the significant undertaking of seeking PCMH recognition.

We have previously mentioned that securing such recognition is a distinction that is recognized and understood by all in the healthcare environment. It brings with it a certain amount of significant status that adds to a clinic's credibility. It is also a status that is recognized by many in the private funding community. Clinics often have significant reliance for operating support on private funding sources. Achievement of PCMH recognition is an accomplishment that may lend weight to future and/or continuing funding requests. Finally, there is some indication that future public dollars may be connected to PCMH recognition. Those clinics that have such recognition in the future may find themselves eligible for increased federal subsidies or rates of reimbursement.