

Aligning Forces for Quality in West Michigan A Community Snapshot

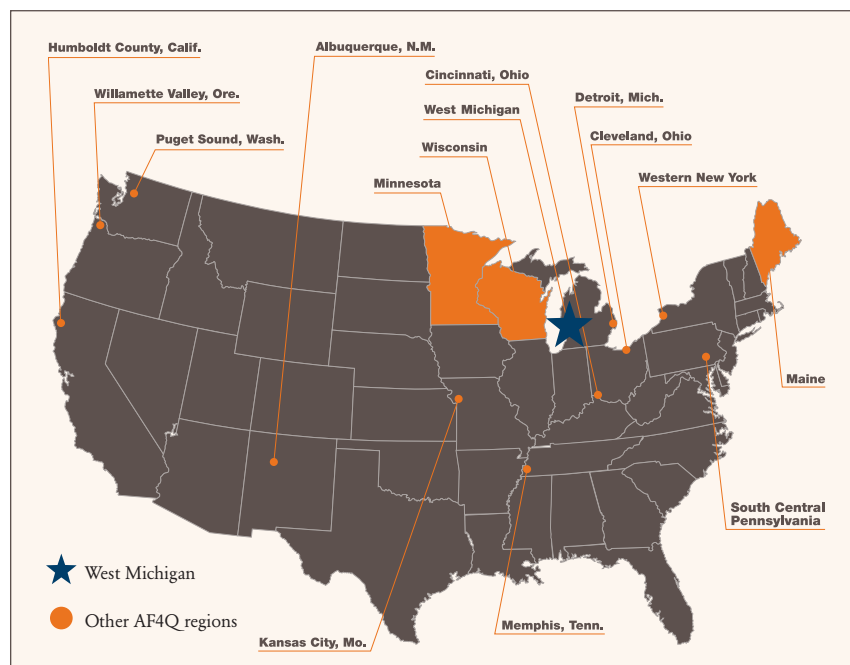
West Michigan, arguably one of the most picturesque parts of the state's Lower Peninsula, has weathered Michigan's worst economic crisis in generations better than many other areas of the state. Grand Rapids, the region's main city, has a diversified business base that has shielded it from some of the hardship that has been inflicted upon Detroit, Flint and other Michigan cities whose fates are more intertwined with that of the domestic auto industry. It is a haven of relative prosperity in one of America's most deeply troubled places.

But even economically hardy regions like West Michigan face tough social problems, including serious health care challenges. More than a quarter of all women insured by Medicare in the region's 13 counties do not get mammograms to detect breast cancer, according to the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care. African Americans there face a five-times greater risk than whites of losing a leg to diabetes.

West Michigan is hardly alone. These are examples of a broader crisis in the quality of care that the U.S. medical system delivers. The statistics in West Michigan are repeated in community after community, endangering the health of millions. And it is not just the failure to deliver care that contributes to the quality problem. Delivering care that harms people—or delivering care that people do not need—is adding billions of dollars to the national health care bill and is one reason why so many Americans cannot afford health insurance.

While the health care crisis is national, care is delivered locally. That is why the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is investing \$300 million in promising efforts to improve local health systems in West

Michigan and 14 other regions across the nation. Called *Aligning Forces for Quality* (AF4Q), the initiative brings an unprecedented commitment of resources, expertise and training to turn proven health care reforms into real results at the community level. The AF4Q initiative focuses on the full continuum of health care delivery—the care provided in doctors' offices, clinics and hospitals, and the support provided in the community. It also emphasizes reducing racial and ethnic disparities in care and strengthening nursing's role in improving quality. It advances three interrelated reforms that experts believe are essential to improving health care quality:



The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Aligning Forces for Quality initiative is a \$300-million commitment of resources, expertise and training to turn proven health care reforms into real results in West Michigan and 14 other regions across the country.

- **Performance measurement and public reporting:** using common standards to measure the quality of patient care and publicly disclosing that performance information.
- **Consumer engagement:** educating patients about their local health care systems to encourage them to demand higher-quality care and help them take a more active role in their own health.
- **Quality improvement:** implementing techniques and protocols that let doctors and hospitals raise the quality of care they deliver to patients.

This snapshot describes how the AF4Q initiative is being implemented in West Michigan and the progress being made on these three main fronts.

How AF4Q Is Being Implemented in West Michigan

In 2007, RWJF selected the Alliance for Health, a nonprofit community health care collaborative with a 60-year history, to implement the AF4Q effort in West Michigan. Alliance members include all of the region’s key health care stakeholder groups—physicians, nurses, consumers, payers, business and government leaders, academics, and others.

The Alliance was chosen through a competition to find groups best positioned to make fundamental, cutting-edge changes to their region’s health care system. In addition to expertise, technical assistance and training from national experts, RWJF is providing the Alliance with more than \$1 million over three years and access to additional grants for specific projects.

The Alliance has also drawn the federal government’s notice as a promising national model. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently added it to its national network of 25 Chartered Value Exchanges. Membership gives the Alliance access to technical assistance that will enrich its AF4Q work, plus opportunities to learn from other collaboratives pursuing data-driven quality improvement.

The Alliance, like most of the other 14 AF4Q groups, receives support from multiple sources. Its AF4Q initiative, Health Care Vision 2020 (HCV 2020), is partially funded by the state of Michigan. HCV 2020 will advance AF4Q goals in the areas of performance measurement, public reporting, consumer engagement and quality improvement. It will also use the funds to help West Michigan health groups share clinical data electronically.

West Michigan Overview

AF4Q service region:

- 13 counties: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola and Ottawa

Health system:

- Hospitals:¹ 29
- Licensed hospital beds:¹ 3,278
- Primary care physicians (M.D.s):² 706
- Primary care physicians (D.O.s):³ 618

Population:⁴ 1,518,986

- White: 90.1%
- African American: 6.3%
- Asian: 1.5%
- Two or more races: 1.5%
- American Indian or Pacific Islander: < 1.0%
- Hispanic: 6.9% (includes all races)
- Under age 18: 25.8%
- Ages 18-64: 62.6%
- Ages 65 and older: 11.6%

Per capita income:⁵ \$22,845

Uninsured (ages 18-64):⁶ 13.5%

West Michigan's AF4Q goals include: (a) improved health for people with chronic diseases; (b) improved quality of care for such patients; and (c) improved value for chronic disease care and other health care expenditures.

The initiative has ambulatory and inpatient components. The Alliance selected diabetes as the initial clinical focus area for its ambulatory care work, likely to be followed by heart failure and coronary artery disease. HCV 2020 has set measurable objectives for this work that correspond to the three AF4Q target areas noted above. Inpatient strategies are designed to improve health care outcomes in hospitals for racial and ethnic minority populations and those who speak English as a second language. HCV 2020 will partner with three regional hospitals that account for approximately 65 percent of hospital discharges in West Central Michigan.

Progress on Performance Measurement and Public Reporting

In most places in the United States, information about health care quality is siloed in a number of sources. The 15 AF4Q teams are forging relationships and breaking down barriers among health care providers, payers and employers to create common systems for collecting and reporting health care performance data.

In 1996, the West Michigan Business Group on Health (which the Alliance convenes) established a health information data exchange system and an initiative to help employers evaluate health plans based on quality and cost, known as value-based purchasing.⁷ The health plan measurement process was the precursor to eValue8, a tool now used nationally and managed by the National Business Coalition on Health, which represents more than 10,000 public and private sector employers with approximately 34 million employees and dependents. Other West Michigan organizations have been reporting on hospital quality for some time, and some health plans in the region have experience measuring hospital and physician performance.

Michigan was also one of the first states to adopt and report the Leapfrog Group performance measures for hospitals.⁸ The Michigan Health and Safety Coalition produces these hospital reports using an expanded set of performance criteria.

Moving forward, the Alliance is launching a pilot project to develop and test processes for collecting, editing, assembling and analyzing data on patient care in physician practices. The pilot will test the ability to create aggregated physician performance reports and assess their value. HCV 2020 is committed to expanding public reporting of select hospital performance indicators stratified by race, ethnicity and primary language.

In addition to collecting and reporting performance data, all AF4Q teams are seeking ways to measure and analyze their community's overall health. These efforts can help them identify public health interventions in tandem with improvements in care in clinical settings. The Alliance has access to numerous population-wide and regionally based data sources, as well as to a rich supply of geo-health data through a partnership with Grand Valley State University's Community Research Institute.

Progress on Consumer Engagement

HCV 2020 has set three goals for engaging patients and consumers: (1) helping consumers understand what constitutes high-quality health care and raising their awareness about differences in quality among providers; (2) educating consumers about how personal choices and habits affect their health and helping them identify behaviors that can improve their well-being; and (3) enrolling more patients with chronic diseases in effective self-management programs.

To accomplish these goals, HCV 2020 has launched a communications campaign called “Rethink Healthy: Learn. Ask. Act.” It is aimed at the whole West Michigan community and focuses on consumers with diabetes, heart disease and other chronic illnesses. Current outreach plans include a media campaign; the “Rethink Healthy” Web site (www.rethinkhealthy.org); restaurant placemats; and a “What is High Quality Health Care?” brochure in multiple languages. HCV 2020 will engage employers, unions, employer associations, physicians and other providers, health plans, consumer groups and community organizations in these communications efforts.

HCV 2020 has also reached out to the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute to conduct public meetings about and encourage participation in the AF4Q program. The Institute also will conduct focus groups to learn more about what prevents African Americans from seeking hospital care.

Progress on Quality Improvement

Quality improvement efforts in health care increasingly focus on lifting the performance of entire systems, not just that of individuals. All 15 AF4Q grantees have been asked to consider ways to create a permanent quality improvement resource in their community, for example by identifying or founding an entity or setting up a network to share knowledge and best practices on improving care.

In West Michigan, HCV 2020 is creating a research and technical assistance unit to improve the quality and efficiency of ambulatory and chronic care. The new West Michigan Center for Health Improvement will design quality-improvement strategies that promote highly efficient, evidence-based care and help physician practices meet or exceed the principles of patient-centered medical homes—a model of care based on a strong doctor-patient relationship that emphasizes coordinated care over long periods instead of episodic care based on illnesses and patient health complaints. Strategies being considered include:

- helping install quality-management systems tools and providing consultation;
- providing quality-improvement training modules on topics such as leadership development and managing changes in culture;
- helping implement clinical information systems to support quality improvement and performance reporting; and
- creating opportunities for shared learning and exchange of best practices.

HCV 2020 plans to create links between the Center and state and national health care quality improvement groups such as the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, the Michigan Primary Care Consortium and the Michigan Improving Performance in Practice initiative. The Center will also use performance data on diabetes care and heart failure to create tools to improve the quality of and reduce disparities in care. It will develop resources to help consumers become more engaged in their health care, provide education and training and work closely with MPRO (www.mpro.org), Michigan’s health care quality improvement organization.

Additionally, quality improvement efforts are key components of HCV 2020's strategy to reduce disparities in health care quality in hospitals. HCV 2020 will share data on both heart failure and coronary artery bypass graft surgery with hospital quality improvement teams to help them: (a) make better decisions about care for patients of color and those with language barriers and (b) improve the exchange of information about patients between their hospital and outpatient providers.

Aligning Forces for Quality

The premise of AF4Q is that these strategies—public reporting and performance measurement, consumer engagement and quality improvement—must be implemented in a coordinated way to lift the overall quality of health care. That is why the overarching goal of both the national AF4Q program and HCV 2020 in West Michigan is to bring community stakeholders together to drive change on these three critical fronts to improve health and health care quality.

For more information about AF4Q in West Michigan, visit www.afh.org and www.rwjf.org/qualityequality/af4q/communities/wmichigan.jsp.

Research for this report was provided by the Aligning Forces for Quality Evaluation Team at Penn State University's Center for Health Care and Policy Research, which is studying the AF4Q initiative to gain insights about community-based reform that can guide health care practice and policy. For more information, visit www.hbdev.psu.edu/CHCPR/activities/project_alignforce.html.

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¹2009 Michigan Department of Community Health.

²2006 American Medical Association Physician Masterfile (taken from the 2007 HRSA Area Resource File).

³2004 American Osteopathic Association (taken from the 2007 HRSA Area Resource File).

⁴2007 Population Estimates—U.S. Census Bureau.

⁵2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates.

⁶2005 Census Small Area Health Insurance Estimates.

⁷eValue8 (www.evaluate8.org) is a health information tool widely used by business health coalitions, their purchaser members and national employers to assess and manage the quality of their health care vendors.

⁸The Leapfrog Group (www.leapfroggroup.org) is a voluntary program aimed at mobilizing employer purchasing power to alert America's health industry that big leaps in health care safety, quality and customer value will be recognized and rewarded. It works to make reporting health care quality and outcomes a routine feature of the U.S. health care system by providing information on health care quality so consumers can compare hospitals.