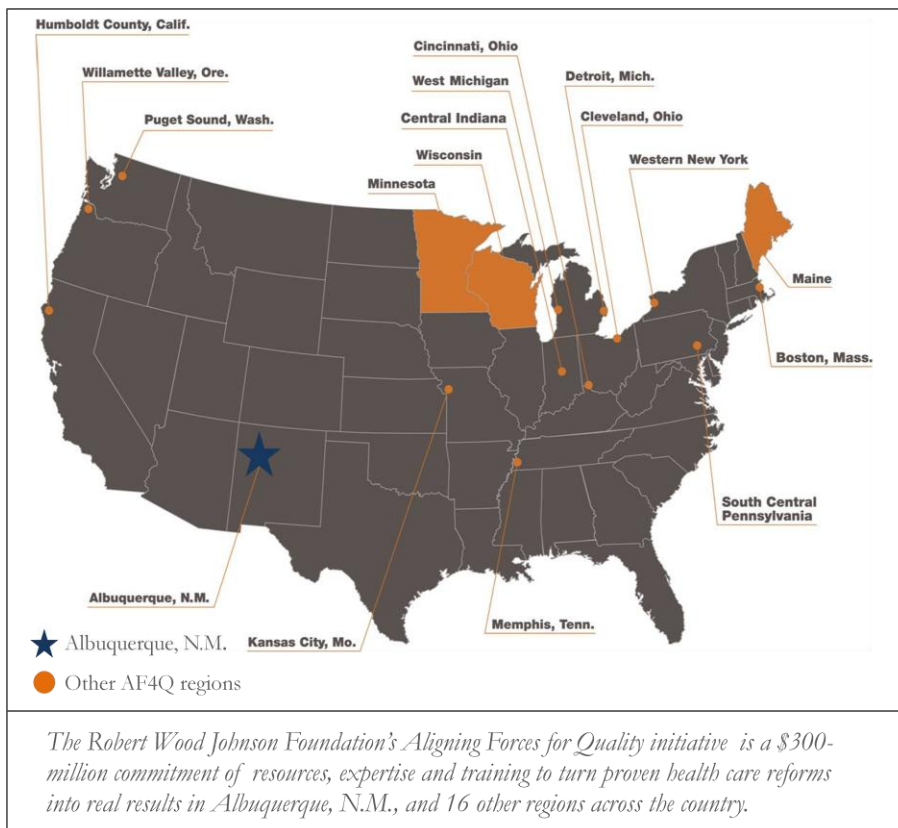


Aligning Forces for Quality in Albuquerque

A Community Snapshot

Albuquerque’s diverse culture can be attributed to its long history. The area had been populated and cultivated by Native Americans for thousands of years before Spanish explorers arrived and created a more permanent settlement along the famous El Camino Real, a trading route between Mexico City and Santa Fe. From its beginnings, Albuquerque has become the center of technology, business and tourism for New Mexico. Albuquerque is home to some of the nation’s leading high-tech research facilities and popular tourist destinations, from the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta to the world’s longest aerial tramway and the famous Route 66. Even with the city’s large employers, the economic mainstay consists mostly of small, locally owned businesses that provide everyday services. This 300-year-old city has evolved from a small trading post into the largest city in New Mexico while maintaining many of its historical roots through its diverse population.

Needless to say, the Albuquerque area faces tough social problems, including serious health care challenges like the rest of the country. According to the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care, each year 25 percent of Medicare patients do not visit a primary care physician in a non-hospital setting. More than 20 percent of diabetic Medicare patients between the ages of 65 and 75 do not get recommended blood tests. More than one in three women, between 67 and 69 years of age and insured by Medicare, do not get mammograms to detect breast cancer. Nearly 30 percent of patients between the ages of 66 and 75 with cardiovascular conditions do not get annual cholesterol checks.



Albuquerque is hardly alone in the nation on such health care scores. These are examples of a broader crisis in the quality of care that the U.S. medical system delivers. The statistics in Albuquerque 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 don’t 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 Albuquerque and 16 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:

- **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 Albuquerque and the progress being made on these three main fronts.

How AF4Q is Being Implemented in Albuquerque

In 2009, RWJF selected the Albuquerque Coalition for Healthcare Quality (AC4HQ), a multi-stakeholder collaborative, to implement the AF4Q effort in Albuquerque. AC4HQ, a new coalition, is committed to working across organizations and Albuquerque’s multicultural community to improve health care systems and outcomes for residents. AC4HQ is housed within the New Mexico Medical Review Association (NMMRA), the state’s Medicare health care quality improvement organization.

AC4HQ 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 AC4HQ with \$1.4 million over three years (beginning in 2009) and access to additional grants for specific projects.

Albuquerque Overview

AF4Q service region:

- 1 county: Bernalillo

Health System:

- General hospitals:¹ 8
- General hospital beds:¹ 2,010
- Primary Care Providers (MDs):² 535
- Primary Care Physicians (DOs):³ 86

Population:⁴ 642,527

- White: 85.6%
- African American: 4.2%
- Asian: 2.4%
- Two or more races: 2.3%
- American Indian or Pacific Islander: 5.4%
- Hispanic: 46.7% (includes all races)
- Under Age 18: 24.3%
- Ages 18-64: 63.4%
- 65 & older: 12.3%

Per capita income:⁵ \$26,102

Uninsured (ages 18-64):⁶ 27.1%

AC4HQ's goals are to: (1) improve health status; (2) promote consistent delivery of high quality care; (3) increase consumer engagement and partnership with health care providers; and (4) contain health care costs. In its first year as an AF4Q Alliance, AC4HQ created a coalition and its supporting infrastructure, established both a 70-member Leadership Council and 12-member Steering Committee, and populated workgroups for performance measurement/public reporting, consumer engagement and quality improvement.

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 17 AF4Q teams are forging relationships and breaking down barriers between health care providers, payers and employers to create common systems for collecting and reporting health care performance data.

As an example of measurement and reporting activities presently underway in the Albuquerque region, the New Mexico Hospital Association has published PricePoint information that provides volume, pricing and payer mix information for New Mexico hospitals. Additionally, local health plans collect performance information related to several chronic diseases. New Mexico Health Care Takes On Diabetes (NMFCTOD), a coalition of 25 health care organizations, produces diabetes guidelines for the state, creates tools for providers, and publicly reports on annual performance on six diabetes measures across health insurance providers.

AC4HQ is working to produce the first public report of physician quality in the Albuquerque region by the end of 2010. The initial report will focus on three provider groups and will include a total of six measures for diabetes, cardiac, asthma and preventive cancer screenings. The Alliance will use three claims data sources (commercial, Medicaid and Medicare Advantage) for this report. AC4HQ recently incorporated a consumer-friendly version of Hospital Compare measures, including HCAHPS patient experience of care data, into its website. After promoting this resource to the community through the local media, AC4HQ is engaging employers, hospitals and consumer groups to share this resource with their constituents.

In addition to collecting and reporting performance data, all AF4Q communities 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. AC4HQ is working with NMMRA, which has a long history of using data to engage providers in system change and quality improvement initiatives. NMFCTOD, one of AC4HQ's partners, has created a population-based dataset capable of producing evidence-based, diabetes performance measures for New Mexico. In the future, the New Mexico Department of Health has numerous, population-based databases that can provide insight into Albuquerque's public reporting efforts. The New Mexico Human Services Department, which runs the state Medicaid program, is also a wealth of knowledge. By working with these organizations and using their data, AC4HQ will be able to provide state benchmarks for upcoming and future public reports.

AC4HQ plans to include both patient experience and cost/efficiency data in the next iterations of its public reports. In the future, AC4HQ will work to identify several performance measures and data sources within hospital and health plan data that can be stratified by race, ethnicity or language. Currently, efforts are underway to partner with the local academic health center, which has its own method of collecting disparities measurements. Additionally, AC4HQ hosted an event for local physicians to share how public reporting efforts in other AF4Q alliances have been implemented and how this tool can benefit the Albuquerque community.

Progress on Consumer Engagement

Since its commencement as an AF4Q Alliance, AC4HQ has carried out several activities to help engage consumers more deeply in their health care. AC4HQ developed a website (www.abqhealthcarequality.org) and posted information for consumers, providers and employers on this resource. AC4HQ will work with local medical associations, physician practices, hospitals and health plans to promote AC4HQ's website through their communications with their members. Additionally, in conjunction with the National Partnership for Women and Families, AC4HQ hosted a listening session with more than 30 consumer advocates to discuss the topic of health care quality and to introduce them to the AF4Q initiative.

AC4HQ recently completed a broad consumer interview process to identify local concerns and perceptions about health care quality, as well as health care information sources. This survey was completed in order to identify what consumers know about health care quality and health care delivery in Albuquerque and what consumers would like to see improved. AC4HQ plans to use this information and additional consumer research results to help enrich the content and messaging of its website and other consumer materials. AC4HQ also wants to partner with other organizations to share information about quality health care issues, and drive consumers to access and use consumer-friendly health information. Additionally, AC4HQ hosted an event with the National Business Coalition on Health to engage employers in its efforts.

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 17 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 March 2010, AC4HQ presented results of a race, ethnicity and language survey it conducted with Albuquerque hospitals to the New Mexico Hospital Association (NMHA). The results showed varied practices in the collection of race, ethnicity and language data. The Alliance is currently working through NMHA to identify the next steps and create a plan to move forward with standardizing the collection of this data in the community. With all of the acute care hospitals participating in the AF4Q Hospital Quality Network (HQN), this standardization will be achieved.

AC4HQ has established a nursing leadership team, coordinated by the Center for Nursing Excellence, focused on sharing and exchanging best practices in inpatient quality improvement. The Center for Nursing Excellence's first project will address reducing patient falls in the hospital setting by identifying best practices, and educating and engaging the community. Presently, there are two hospitals involved in the Transforming Care at the Bedside (TCAB) collaborative through AF4Q; these participants are also involved in the Center for Nursing Excellence project. Additionally, a local organization, LCF Research, was awarded a three-year grant by RWJF through the Development Fund to evaluate the impact of the New Mexico Health Information Collaborative (NMHIC) Health Information Exchange.

AC4HQ has conducted an assessment of what is happening in the community in relation to improving care in the ambulatory setting. The scan, as well as the Ambulatory Quality Network, will be used to inform the quality improvement work that providers will be implementing.

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 in order to lift the overall quality of health care. That is why the overarching goal of both the national AF4Q program and AC4HQ in Albuquerque 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 Albuquerque, please visit www.abqhealthcarequality.org and www.rwjf.org/qualityequality/af4q/communities/albuquerque.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 <http://www.hbdev.psu.edu/CHCPR/alignforce/>.

¹ 2010 Albuquerque Coalition for Healthcare Quality and 2010 HRSA Area Resource File

² 2007 American Medical Association Physician Masterfile (taken from the 2008 HRSA Area Resource File)

³ 2007 American Osteopathic Association (taken from the 2008 HRSA Area Resource File)

⁴ 2009 Population Estimates – U.S. Census Bureau

⁵ 2006-2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

⁶ 2007 Census Small Area Health Insurance Estimates