Established in 1999, the National Quality Forum (NQF) is a public service organization. Nonprofit, nonpartisan, and member-driven, NQF reviews, endorses and recommends healthcare quality measures. These measures serve as the information base of public and private initiatives focused on enhancing the value—or quality and affordability—of healthcare.

Governed by a diverse board of directors, NQF has over 400 organizational members that span the healthcare system, including public and private purchasers, consumer organizations, physicians, hospitals, accrediting and certifying bodies, and other healthcare stakeholders.

**NQF’s Role in Improving Healthcare Quality and Reducing Costs**

Roughly a decade ago, a group of private and public healthcare leaders were catalyzed by Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports that called for increasing healthcare information and transparency in order to improve healthcare quality. Their long term vision included evidence-based report cards that help doctors and hospitals know how they are doing; allow payers to purchase healthcare services on the basis of value not volume; guide patients looking for medical care so they have more to go on than the best guesses and advice of family and friends; and alert all of us to any patient safety problems.

With these goals in mind, NQF emerged as a key player in transforming American healthcare to be more information rich—given its focus on endorsing performance measures used by providers, patients, healthcare purchasers and policymakers to improve quality of care, enhance safety and reduce costs.

More specifically, NQF has played an important public service role in:

- **Getting diverse stakeholders to align their goals for improving quality**—NQF has served as a forum for the public and private sectors to achieve consensus about priority areas to focus on for improvement and strategies to close recognized gaps e.g., enhancing patient safety and coordination when patients transition between care settings.

- **Reviewing, endorsing and updating quality measures that spur providers to improve and help policymakers assess whether their interventions are working**—NQF endorses a diverse set of quality measures that meet its rigorous standards. Widely adopted, these measures are key to federal, private sector, state and local efforts to improve the quality and affordability of healthcare through public reporting and pay for performance. Widespread use of NQF-endorsed measures reduces redundant data collection, enhances data comparability, and accelerates improvement.

- **Providing critical input to policymakers on which performance measures to incorporate into federal healthcare programs**—Based on a rigorous process, a NQF-convened partnership provides multi-stakeholder input on measures used in over 20 different federal programs, including the majority of Federal Compare websites and in all the major Medicare payment programs for hospitals, health plans, clinicians and others.

- **Endorsing measures that have driven results**—Examples include a 58% reduction in central line associated blood stream infections (CLABSIs) between 2001 and 2009 resulting in 6,000 lives and $1.8 billion in excess healthcare costs (CDC) saved, as well as a decline in mortality among a subset of 650 hospitals that implemented NQF endorsed Safe Practices (*Surgery*, May 2012), among others.
How NQF is funded
Roughly one-third of NQF’s resources come from private foundation grants and member dues and the balance from the public sector. More specifically, under President Bush NQF received federal support under the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) of 2008. Under the current Administration, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 authorized new responsibilities and funding for NQF through FY 2014. Most recently, the American Taxpayer Relief Act, also known as the “fiscal cliff” legislation, extended NQF’s MIPPA funding through FY 2013.

NQF’s future role
Combining and extending these two federal funding streams will allow NQF to continue bringing public and private stakeholders together to develop consensus about quality improvement priorities and selection of measures for reporting and payment programs. Also, this funding is crucial for continuing the work to review and endorse measures that are the backbone of public and private quality and cost reduction initiatives. In addition to this core work, NQF specifically seeks continued funding to:

- **Review and endorse “next generation” quality measures**: A key priority is endorsing next generation measures that are more meaningful to patients and families, that help track patient outcomes across healthcare settings, and that can move the US system to be more patient centered;
- **Increase the focus on measures that can reduce cost and waste**: Another critical focus is reviewing and endorsing measures that can make care more affordable. Additional funding would also be used to provide guidance to public and private leaders on how to pair quality and cost measures for value-based purchasing efforts;

- **Speed up the measurement pipeline to reduce unnecessary burden**: NQF can help facilitate faster filling of measure gaps by prioritizing these gaps and identifying development collaborators; examining how technology and other innovations can reduce endorsement cycle time; and continuously seeking to improve its processes so as to alleviate unnecessary burden and costs associated with measurement; and

- **Systematically obtain feedback from payers, providers and others on the use and usefulness of measures**: Such information could help inform policymakers on what measures are being used, for what purposes, as well as provide insight about which measures are leading to improvements with respect to quality and cost reduction. Such information also can inform NQF efforts.

There has been great progress made in laying the groundwork for more transparency and accountability in the US healthcare system with the development, endorsement and use of standardized, comparable measures. This is testament to the increasing collaboration of public and private leaders and more specifically to the over 850 experts who volunteer their time to work on NQF committees in a given year. These leaders from every part of the healthcare system are aligning their measurement-based approaches to improving the quality and affordability of healthcare to benefit patients, the broader public, employers, government and our nation as a whole.