

# NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM

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## **INACTIVE ENDORSEMENT with RESERVE STATUS**

Given the number of publicly reported measures with high levels of performance, reliable and valid measures of great importance may not retain NQF endorsement due to the lack of a performance gap. The purpose of an inactive endorsement with reserve status is to retain endorsement of reliable and valid quality performance measures that have overall high levels of performance with little variability so that performance could be monitored as necessary to ensure that performance does not decline. This status would apply only to highly credible, reliable, and valid measures that have high levels of performance due to incorporation into standardized patient care processes and quality improvement actions. The key issue for continued endorsement is the opportunity cost associated with continued measurement at high levels of performance – rather than focusing on areas with known gaps in care. Endorsement with reserve status retains these measures in the NQF Portfolio for periodic monitoring, while also communicating to potential users that the measures no longer address high leverage areas for accountability purposes.

### **Measures with High Levels of Performance - Recommendations from the Evidence Task Force**

The 2010 [Evidence Task Force](#) defined the term “topped out,” meaning there are high levels of performance with little variation and, therefore, little room for further improvement. The Task Force did not recommend specific quantitative thresholds for identifying conformance with the subcriterion opportunity for improvement (1b). Threshold values for opportunity for improvement would be difficult to standardize and depend on the size of the population at risk, the effectiveness of an intervention, and the consequences of the quality problem. For example, even modest variation would be sufficient justification for some highly effective, potentially life-saving treatments (e.g., certain vaccinations) that are critical to the public health.

The Task Force noted that, at the time of endorsement maintenance review, if measure performance data indicate overall high performance with little variation, then justification would be required for continued endorsement of the measure. The Consensus Standards Approval

Committee (CSAC) added that the default action should be to remove endorsement unless there is a strong justification to continue endorsement. If a measure fails opportunity for improvement (1b), then it does not pass the threshold criterion, *Importance to Measure and Report*, and is therefore not suitable for endorsement.

**Task Force Recommendations related to opportunity for improvement (1b) include the following:**

- At the time of initial endorsement, evidence for opportunity for improvement generally will be based on research studies, or on epidemiologic or resource use data. However, at the time of review for endorsement maintenance, the primary interest is on the endorsed measure as specified, and the *evidence for opportunity for improvement should be based on data for the specific endorsed measure*.
- When assessing measure performance data for opportunity for improvement, the following factors should be considered:
  - number and representativeness of the entities included in the measure performance data;
  - data on disparities; and
  - size of the population at risk, effectiveness of an intervention, likely occurrence of an outcome, and consequences of the quality problem.
- In exceptional situations, a strong justification for continued endorsement could be considered (e.g., *evidence* that overall performance will likely deteriorate if not monitored, magnitude of potential harm if outcomes deteriorate while not being monitored).

**Criteria for Assigning Inactive Endorsement with Reserve Status to Measures with High Levels of Performance**

There is rarely evidence that performance will deteriorate if a measure is not monitored; therefore, some additional criteria are needed. The following criteria are to be used when there are concerns that performance will deteriorate, but no evidence. These criteria are intentionally rigorous so that the use of endorsement with reserve status is by exception.

- Evidence of little opportunity for improvement (1b), i.e., overall high level of performance with little variation. When assessing measure performance data for opportunity for improvement, the following factors should be considered:
  - distribution of performance scores;
  - number and representativeness of the entities included in the measure performance data;
  - data on disparities; and
  - size of the population at risk, effectiveness of an intervention, likely occurrence of an outcome, and consequences of the quality problem.

- Evidence for measure focus (1a) – there should be strong direct evidence of a link to a desired health outcome; therefore, there would be detrimental consequence on patient health outcomes if performance eroded. Generally measures more distal to the desired outcome have only indirect evidence of influence on the outcome and would not qualify for reserve endorsement status.

For process and structure measures, the measure focus should be proximal to the desired outcome. Generally, measures more distal to the desired outcome would not be eligible for reserve status.

- Reliability (2a) – high or moderate rating: Reliability has been demonstrated for the measure score.
- Validity (2b) – high or moderate: Validity has been demonstrated by empiric testing for the measure score (face validity not acceptable).
- The reason for high levels of performance is better performance, not an issue with measure construction/specifications (e.g., “documentation”).
- Demonstrated usefulness for improving quality (e.g., data on trends of improvement and scope of patients and providers included).
- Demonstrated use of the measure (e.g., specific programs and scope of patients and providers included; would not grant inactive endorsement status for a measure that has not been used).
- If a measure is found to be “topped out”, i.e., does not meet criteria for opportunity for improvement (1b), the measure will only be considered for inactive endorsement with reserve status. The measure must meet all other criteria as noted above, otherwise the measure should not be endorsed.

## **Maintenance of Inactive Endorsement with Reserve Status**

Measures assigned inactive endorsement status will not be reviewed in the usual endorsement maintenance review cycle. During portfolio review the Standing Committee will periodically review measures in reserve status for any change in evidence, evidence of deterioration in performance or unintended consequences, or any other concerns related to the measure. The Standing Committee may remove a measure from inactive endorsement status if the measure no longer meets NQF endorsement criteria. A maintenance review may occur upon a request from the Standing Committee or measure steward to return the measure to active endorsement.

Measures in reserve status will be considered for harmonization with related or competing measures. Measure developers should be aware of measures in reserve status and avoid developing duplicative measures.