NATIONAL QUALITY FORUM
Driving measurable health improvements together

# Meeting Summary

## Best Practices for Developing and Testing Risk Adjustment Models Standing Committee Web Meeting #1

The National Quality Forum (NQF) convened a public web meeting for the Best Practices for Developing and Testing Risk Adjustment Models project on October 22, 2021. This project is funded by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services under Task Order 75FCMC20F0001 – Best Practices for Developing and Testing Risk Adjustment Models Option Period 1.

### Welcome, Introductions, and Review of Web Meeting Objectives

Dr. Matthew Pickering, NQF Senior Director, began by welcoming participants to the web meeting. Dr. Pickering proceeded to provide opening remarks and invited Co-chairs Philip Alberti and Karen Joynt Maddox to provide welcoming remarks. Hannah Ingber, NQF Senior Analyst, facilitated roll call and thanked the Technical Expert Panel (TEP) and Federal Liaisons for their contributions during the initial 12-months (i.e., base period) and for their time and input towards the next 12-months of this work (i.e., option period).

Dr. Pickering then reviewed the meeting's objectives:

- Introduce of the TEP members and discuss roles, responsibilities and ground rules
- Review base period accomplishments
- Review and discuss the scope and objectives of the option period
- Obtain TEP-input on the approach of stakeholder engagement (i.e., review of the draft Interview Guide)

### Project Overview and Timeline

Dr. Pickering began by reminding TEP members and participants, that NQF is a consensus-based entity (CBE), convening multi stakeholders to come to consensus on standards or endorsement of measures that are used in various national quality improvement programs.

Dr. Pickering emphasized the importance of fair and unbiased comparisons of performance when utilizing measures in various programs. He described how patient-level characteristics that are clinical, social, and functional in nature can directly or indirectly affect the measure outcome. To control for these factors, risk adjustment models are used within quality measurement. However, when and how to adjust for social and functional factors in quality measurement remains inconsistent with limited consensus. Dr. Pickering summarized that there is a perceived need for more standardized technical guidance to support the development of these risk models that account for such factors and to further provide consistency for NQF quality measure endorsement.

During the base period, NQF conducted an Environmental Scan that assessed the current landscape of social and functional risk adjustment approaches used within quality measurement. The findings from the Environmental Scan were used to inform the TEP's decisions for the development of a Technical Guidance Report. This guidance provides a step-by-step approach for measure developers and will support NQF measure endorsement evaluation by NQF's Standing Committees and NQF's Scientific

Methods Panel. Dr. Pickering provided an overview of the Technical Guidance, reviewing the minimum standards within each step of the guidance. During the option period, NQF will continue to bolster the minimum standards by socializing the Technical Guidance through expanded stakeholder engagement to better understand the feasibility and applicability of this guidance.

Dr. Pickering discussed the option period objectives, which are to leverage the expertise of the TEP to inform the broadened stakeholder engagement and to drive to consensus on updates to the Technical Guidance based on findings from the expanded stakeholder engagement activities. NQF will accomplish these objectives by conducting six focus groups made up of diverse individuals including those from medically underserved communities (as noted in the White House Executive Order), stakeholders with under-represented viewpoints (i.e., opinions that differ from the recommendations within the Technical Guidance), and/or those who will use the Technical Guidance to inform decisions for measure development and implementation. NQF will further present the Technical Guidance during several Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)-convened meetings. The feedback and findings from the focus groups and the CMS-convened meetings will be used to inform the TEP's decisions on updates to the Technical Guidance. Those focus group categories include consumer and patients, payers and purchasers, providers, measure developers, NQF-convened groups (e.g., members form NQF Standing Committees, SMP), and Quality Improvement Program Leadership (e.g., Center for Clinical Standards and Quality, Quality Measurement & Value Based Incentives Group, Office of Minority Health, and University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Community Provider Services). The focus groups will consist of a total of eight to 10 participants and meetings will be up to two hours in duration. These findings will be summarized by NQF within the Stakeholder Feedback Memo and will be used to update to the Technical Guidance.

## Overview of Roles and Responsibilities

Dr. Pickering reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the TEP, Co-chairs, Federal Liaisons, CMS, and NQF staff. The TEP members will serve as experts working with NQF staff to achieve the goals of the project. To serve this purpose, the TEP is expected to complete work outside of the web meetings including review meeting materials in advance and engage in meeting discussions, provide timely and relevant feedback on project deliverables, and help respond to public comments submitted during the review period. The TEP will also be tasked to steer the development of major project components by providing input and guidance on the current state of risk adjustment for social and functional status in measurement, including emerging best practices; the approach to conducting the focus groups; and the revisions of Technical Guidance. The Co-chairs have an additional role of helping to facilitate TEP discussions during web meetings and to provide additional more detailed input on deliverables. The Federal Liaisons serve as a resource to supplement discussions for matters of factual and accuracy questions related to federal programs and measures. NQF is a neutral convener to gather multistakeholder perspectives and facilitates the consensus decisions of the TEP. CMS funds this Task Order 75FCMC20F0001 Best Practices for Developing and Testing Risk Adjustment Models and provides input to ensure the project is completed according to the Statement of Work (SOW). NQF will further work with CMS colleagues to leverage their expertise and knowledge for this project.

## Draft Interview Guide Overview and Committee Discussion

Prior to the review of the draft Interview Guide, Dr. Pickering asked the TEP members to share entities or individuals to include in the recruitment list for each of the focus groups. To better support the discussions across each focus group, the TEP suggested using examples or prompts to walk through, to guide the discussion on areas of ambiguity with respect to the minimum standards.

Starting with the developer focus group, Dr. Pickering reviewed the goals, participants, and discussion questions for this group. The goal of the measure developer focus group is to gain feedback on the feasibility and applicability of the Technical Guidance, namely the minimum standards. A TEP member expressed concerns that many of the developers recruited are senior level staff and suggested that NQF recruit representatives from the analyst or associate level. In addition, the TEP member stated the discussion with this group should also take into consideration the timing and development of measures and the required resources needed to execute the minimum standards within the guidance. One TEP member expressed the concern of not being able to measure certain social risk factors, unlike medical/clinical risk factors, and emphasized the importance of developing databases to enable the testing of a proposed measure within the patient subgroups of interest. It was proposed that CMS use its Virtual Research Data Center (VRDC) to include more variables for testing, which can then be applied to other data sets and encouraged the alignment across different federal partners to receive feedback on the expansion of data collection.

Moving to the NQF-convened groups, Dr. Pickering mentioned that this focus group has similar goals and questions as the measure developer focus group but from the perspective of measure evaluators. A TEP member suggested recruiting members from NQF's Measure Applications Partnership (MAP), due to their focus on a measure's intended use (i.e., value-based payments, public reporting, quality improvement).

Dr. Pickering reviewed the Quality Improvement Program Leadership goal, which is to gain input on risk adjustment policies that pertain to the intended use, the locus of control, and the outcome(s) that are being measured. A TEP member expressed concern with the language in the fourth question: "Is there a role for adjustment of quality measurement, independent of what happens with payment adjustments?" The TEP member expressed that there is a need for risk adjustment regardless of whether there are payments occurring. The TEP agreed and suggested reframing the question in consideration of this concern. One TEP member mentioned recruiting individuals from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Advancing Health Equity (AHE) initiative pilot, which is occurring with seven states, which is focusing on improving health equity through value-based payment models.

Moving to the Payer and Purchaser focus group, Dr. Pickering reviewed the goal and discussion questions. He noted that the goal for this group is to gain feedback on the Technical Guidance's minimum standards, and whether risk adjustment should occur at the measure level, and/or the program design level. A TEP member suggested payers can be measure developers, users of measures, and the entity that can held accountable to measures. Therefore, the questions should also attempt to touch on all of these roles.

Dr. Pickering reviewed the goal and discussion questions for the consumer focus group. He stated that the goal was to better understand the extent to which consumers agree with the recommendations in the Technical Guidance and make inferences about publicly reported performance data. NQF seeks to gain input from patients/caregivers on how they interpret and use quality measure results and how measures should take into account the provider's patient mix. Dr. Pickering mentioned that NQF will seek to recruit individuals form medically underserved communities. Dr. Pickering stated that NQF will identify patients/consumers from several patient advocacy organizations, such as Rare Patient Voice, Patient & Family Centered Care (PFCC) Partners, National Patient Advocacy Foundation, Project Patient Care, and others. Additionally, NQF project staff will collaborate with the TEP and NQF's Patient and Caregiver Engagement Advisory Board to identify potential patient partners.

Lastly, Dr. Pickering reviewed the goal and discussion questions of the Provider focus group. Dr. Pickering noted that the goal of this group is to gain insight on how providers interpret their locus of

control and their ability to influence social and functional risks. Furthermore, NQF seeks to clarify nuances of the minimum standards within this group, for the TEP's consideration. Namely, NQF will seek to better understand if there are measures that should not take the provider's patient mix into account.

Several TEP members suggested that in addition to discussing the appropriateness of adjustment, there should be a discussion as to which measures are appropriate for social and functional risk adjustment. A TEP member suggested remaining neutral with the questions and removing of the term "masking" due to the potential biased framing.

## Public Comment

Dr. Pickering opened the web meeting to allow for public comment. No public comments were offered during the meeting.

## Next Steps

Dr. Pickering reviewed the schedule of the upcoming web meeting dates including moving the second web meeting to the end of February. During that second web meeting, NQF will review the findings and feedback received from the focus group meetings and the CMS-convened presentations. For web meetings #3 and #4, NQF will engage the TEP on the updates to the Technical Guidance. Web meeting #5 will focus on reviewing and adjudicating with the TEP the public comments received on the Technical Guidance. NQF staff adjourned the meeting by thanking the TEP and the Federal Liaisons for their continued participation and engagement.