

NATIONAL QUALITY POLICY AND STRATEGY: DRIVING CHANGE FOR STRONGER HEALTH SYSTEMS AND IMPROVED HEALTH OUTCOMES

OVERVIEW

The quality of health services has a direct impact on health outcomes for people and communities. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) place an emphasis on achieving universal health coverage (UHC) by “ensuring that all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship.”

The *WHO Framework on integrated people-centred health services* presents a vision in which “all people have access to health services that are provided in a way that responds to their preferences, are coordinated around their needs and are safe, effective, timely, efficient and of acceptable quality.” The proposed action within the *WHO Framework* places a clear emphasis on policy levers to enhance the quality of health services.

The development, refinement and execution of a national quality policy and strategy (NQPS) is a priority for countries as they look to systematically improve the performance of their health care systems. A national quality

policy and strategy is an organized effort by a country to promote and plan for improved quality of care. It will often be outlined in a document, providing an official, explicit statement of the approach and actions required to enhance the quality of health care across a country's health system. The NQPS needs to be closely linked with the wider national health policy and planning process.

With the growing momentum towards achieving UHC, there is increased awareness that improved access must be accompanied by improvements in the quality of health services, if the desired improvements in health outcomes are to be achieved.

Countries across the world are looking at ways to stimulate improvement in health services. A national quality policy and strategy approach can be an important catalyst in this effort. Countries are taking diverse approaches with multiple entry points for improving quality, and many are also looking to the sub-national level as a focus for action. However, the objective remains the same: improvement in the quality of health care as a pivotal entry point for health systems strengthening

and ultimately achieving enhanced population health.

WHAT IS THE HANDBOOK FOR NATIONAL QUALITY POLICY AND STRATEGY?

In response to the global push towards UHC, stakeholder expectations and increasing recognition of the role of quality initiatives in building strong, resilient health systems, a number of countries are embarking on journeys to develop and refine their national policy and strategy for quality of care. The World Health Organization (WHO) is providing technical support to countries wanting to develop such policies and strategies. Informed by a review of existing national quality policies and strategies and engagement with a range of ministries of health and global experts, the *WHO Handbook for National Quality Policy and Strategy* outlines an approach for the development of national direction to improve quality of care. It is not a prescriptive process guide, but, rather, is designed to support teams developing such policies and strategies, recognizing the varied expertise, experience and resources available to countries at different stages. The *Handbook* will be continually refined, based on further country experiences.



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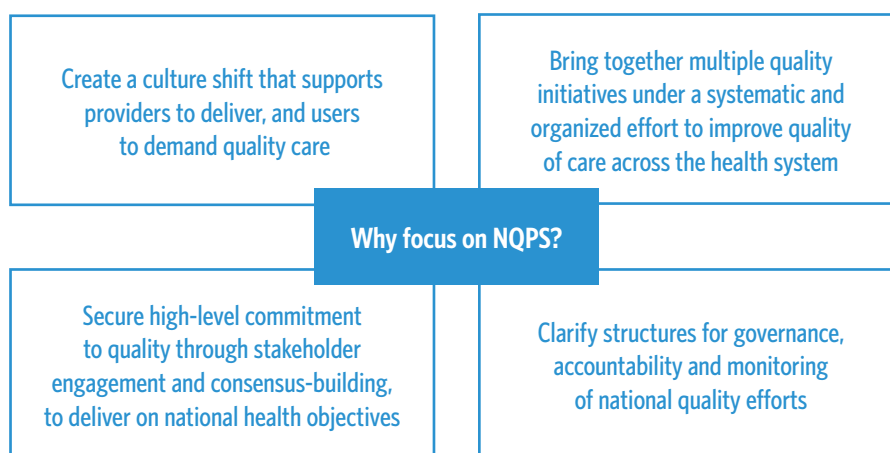
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The eight core elements of the NQPS process, as outlined in the *Handbook*, are shown below. A range of tools and resources are being collated alongside the *Handbook* to support countries navigate the process.

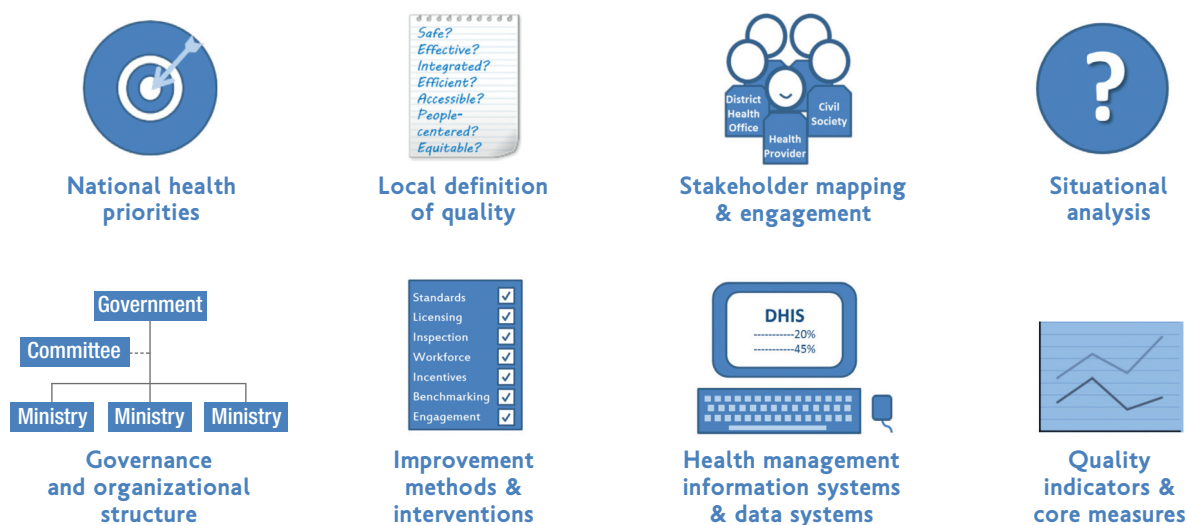
MOVING FORWARD ON NATIONAL QUALITY POLICY AND STRATEGY

Continued shared learning will allow for focused efforts on national quality policies and strategies that are both pragmatic and visionary. Countries

must have their own approach to national quality policy and strategy development, informed by the local definition of quality and integrated with overall long-term health system strengthening processes. WHO will support national governments to:

- **catalyse national action** to build country capacity for the effective development, implementation and monitoring of national quality policies and strategies, as well as allowing future thinking to be informed by country experiences;
- **co-develop resources** for action on quality of care, recognizing significant experience and expertise injected into resource development by country authorities that have planned, developed and implemented national quality policies and strategies;
- **strengthen learning** on national quality policy and strategy by engaging multiple professionals on key issues relating to NQPS, within the WHO Global Learning Laboratory.

ELEMENTS OF THE NATIONAL QUALITY POLICY AND STRATEGY PROCESS



Learn more about NQPS at <http://www.who.int/servicedeliverysafety/areas/qhc/nqps/en/> or email: GLL4QUHC@who.int.
The Quality Systems and Resilience Unit is part of WHO's Department of Service Delivery and Safety.