

1. Introduction

This chapter provides background to the development of the national indicators and explains the purpose of this report, in relation to the broader role of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission, ACSQHC) in leading and coordinating improvements in safety and quality in health care in Australia.

1.1 Background

The Commission

Health ministers established the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care in 2006 with a broad charter to improve safety and quality across the health care system in Australia. The Commission's role is to:

- Lead and coordinate improvements in safety and quality in health care in Australia by identifying issues and policy directions, and recommending priorities for action, disseminating knowledge, and advocating for safety and quality
- Report publicly on the state of safety and quality including performance against national standards
- Recommend national data sets for safety and quality, working within current multilateral governmental arrangements for data development, standards, collection and reporting
- Provide strategic advice to Health Ministers on best practice thinking to drive quality improvement, including implementation of strategies
- Recommend nationally agreed standards for safety and quality improvement.

The National Indicators project

The ACSQHC commissioned the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to develop a set of safety and quality indicators through the *National Indicators* project. The broad objectives were to:

- Recommend indicators for national reporting on safety and quality
- Enable the ACSQHC to 'report publicly on the state of safety and quality'
- Enable the ACSQHC to advise Ministers on whether existing reporting processes and collections should be continued, enhanced, or replaced.

The indicators have been developed in a manner consistent with the broad direction of the Commission's Information Strategy (ACSQHC 2007). In particular, it is intended that the indicators:

- Are suitable for public reporting purposes
- Cover the entire health care system
- Have meaning at a clinical and health service level

- Identify areas where action is needed
- Facilitate international benchmarking
- Are based on routinely collected data where available
- Align with national data standards.

The AIHW has developed the recommended indicator set based on these principles in close consultation with the Commission and the project's National Indicators Advisory Group (NIAG) and through national consultation with a wide range of stakeholders throughout the health care system.

The Commission is currently developing a national strategic framework for safety and quality in health care, based on three concepts: patient centred health care, systemisation of evidence-based health practice and building a culture so 'safety is how we do business.' Future work could include aligning the recommended indicators with this framework.

1.2 Purpose of this report

This report recommends a set of national safety and quality indicators and outlines:

- The national information needs that can or should be met through a national safety and quality indicator set (the indicator framework)
- The extent to which the indicators meet the identified information needs and other selection criteria for the indicators (including international comparability)
- The data specifications, including appropriate population, for each of the recommended indicators (where known)
- The current availability and quality of data for the recommended indicators
- Data for indicators where data are readily available to the AIHW
- The need for data development work to achieve national comparability for the recommended indicators, and to fill gaps in indicator coverage
- Options for national reporting and information use
- Options for international comparison.

Linked with other work in progress, such as work on a national safety and quality framework, this report will help in developing national reporting.

Public reporting

A key purpose of the indicator set is to assist the Commission to report publicly on the state of safety and quality in health care. The Commission is working with jurisdictions, private providers and consumers to develop models for the use of the indicators and reporting to identify significant variations and to support improvements in the safety and quality of health care.

The AIHW suggests that, broadly, reporting on indicators could serve two main purposes: to provide transparency and to inform decision-making about overall priorities and system-level strategies for safety and quality improvement; and to inform quality improvement activities of service providers. Indicators which could serve one or both of these purposes have been included in the recommended indicator set.

Reporting to serve these purposes could include not only national reporting but also ongoing monitoring and reporting at state and territory level and by individual facilities and organisations. The degree to which this reporting should be public varies. Issues regarding public reporting, frequency and form of reporting are explored in section 4.1.