

Sustainability in Quality Improvement: Introduction

The goal of sustainable healthcare is to meet the health needs of patients and populations today and in the future. It brings both a longer term and a broader, more holistic perspective to healthcare management and improvement: we need to make sure that we are considering the needs of the entire population, not just the individual patient; we need to think about preventing illness and building health and resilience; we need to make best possible use of finite resources – not just financial, but also environmental and social.

Sustainability has been recognised as a domain of quality in healthcare^{1,2}, and building it into quality improvement is a practical way to drive incremental change towards a more ethical, sustainable health system.

These learning resources, based on the SusQI framework³, are designed to help you to:

1. Set sustainable goals for your quality improvement project, namely to deliver maximum health gain with minimum financial cost and harmful environmental impacts, whilst adding social value at every opportunity. [*SusQI resource: Introduction*]
2. Recognise the use of environmental and social resources in your current service, and identify opportunities to improve. [*SusQI resources: Studying the System; Sexual Health Patient Pathway*]
3. Design your project using sustainability principles (prevention, empowerment, lean pathways, low carbon alternatives⁴) to achieve the greatest benefit. [*SusQI resource: Designing the Improvement effort*]
4. Measure the impact of your project on sustainable value:

$$\text{VALUE} = \frac{\text{Outcomes for patients \& populations}}{\text{Environmental + Social + Financial impacts}}$$

(the "triple bottom line")

[*SusQI resources: Measuring the carbon footprint of a QI project; Measuring the social impacts of a QI project*]

You can apply a sustainability approach at the different stages of any project. You may also decide to choose a project area that relates closely to sustainability, such as prevention, patient empowerment, reducing pharmaceutical waste or reducing over-investigation / over-treatment.

SusQI general resources: SusQI slide set; Project review template

For more information and support on sustainability in quality improvement, please contact us at the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare: info@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk

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¹ A Strategy for quality: 2011 and beyond. Royal College of Physicians (2011)

² Atkinson, S. et al. Defining Quality and Quality Improvement. Clin Med vol. 10, no. 6 537-539 (2010)

³ Mortimer, F. et al. Sustainability in Quality Improvement: Redefining Value (in submission)

⁴ Mortimer, F. The Sustainable Physician. Clinical Medicine (2010), Vol 10, No 2: 110-11