

Take your patient partnering to the next level

Become a patient partnering all-star on your quality improvement efforts with this quick guide on how to overcome common challenges



**Health Quality
Ontario**

Let's make our health system healthier



you want to make the most out of the input you receive from your patient partners...

Try this!



Bring patient partners in at the very beginning. If patient partners are involved in setting the goals of a project, they will understand the project at a deep level. This will allow you all to grow as a collaborative team and will support the work to be focused on what you can achieve together.



Share as much information as possible about your organization's perspective. Be clear with patient partners on your organization's view of what is the problem the project aims to solve and check in to see if your perspective complements theirs. Let them know what work has been done to date, what you are hoping to change, and how you hope the change will impact patient experience and quality of care. It is also helpful to share any constraints you are working under, including tight timelines or limited resources. Sharing information affirms to patients they are true partners and can help them to tailor their contributions to the project at hand.



Provide resources, learning opportunities or communities of practice to build the skills of patients and staff to partner better together. Learning opportunities will help your patient partners build their skills to communicate and participate as effectively as possible at the table. It also shows you care about investing in them as partners for your organization.



Consider doing some training on the technical aspect of quality improvement for patient partners before the project starts, on topics such as plan-do-study-act cycles, fishbone diagrams, and root-cause analyses. This will help get everyone on the same page.



Resources

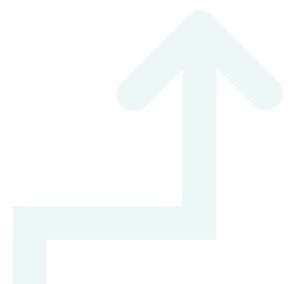
Share this short guide with your patient partners on things they should know before getting involved in quality improvement work:

READ

If a patient asked you to explain quality improvement in plain language, would you know how? Here's a video that does that work for you.

WATCH

“Training on the technical aspects of quality improvement was a big help for me to fully participate at the table during quality improvement projects.” – Patient Partner





you want to maximize the diversity of perspectives and feedback on your project...

Try this!



Before starting your project, take some time to figure out who is missing at the table. It's helpful to identify the range of experiences you want represented, so you can make a plan to reach out directly to people with those experiences.



Communicate in clear language and avoid acronyms and jargon. When someone uses an acronym in a meeting, ask them to define it. Clear communication lets everyone work at the same level of understanding and encourages participation from those who may feel hesitant to speak up.



Keep a friendly and open atmosphere during meetings and be open to hearing negative stories and experiences. When patient partners don't feel comfortable speaking up or challenging an idea, you won't hear different perspectives. Develop active listening skills to hear when unusual ideas come forward that could solve a problem. Challenge your first reaction to an unusual suggestion for improvement and sit with the idea for a while.



Consider going out into the community to talk to people where they feel comfortable. Your current patient partners are great allies to reach out and recruit other people to share input or become involved.



Partner with others when you want to hear from people who are vulnerable or face barriers in the health system. It takes time to build the trust to share honest feedback – working with community health centres and other community organizations that already have strong relationships with service users can support you in hearing about their needs.



Resources

It can be trickier to communicate in plain language than you think. Here is a short guide to help you:

[READ](#)

Ontario's health care system is filled with terms that are hard to understand. Keep them straight by using this guide:

[READ](#)

This guide summarizes some of the most effective techniques you can use to recruit a diverse group of patient partners for your project:

[READ](#)

“When involving patient partners in projects, organizations should be able to articulate the kind of impact that I can have as a patient partner that would be valuable to the organization.” – Patient Partner





you want to keep patient partners fully engaged in your projects...

Try this!



Have a conversation with patient partners about their skills, interests and availability for partnering before providing them a selection of possible partnering opportunities. When you match the skills and interests of your patient partner to the project, everyone will feel more satisfied, and the work will move ahead faster and easier.



Share the scope and goals of the work up front, including the anticipated number of hours, project timeline, and format of partnership, such as in-person meetings, calls, or emails. If patient partners have a clear sense of what they are agreeing to, they are more likely to stay on and complete the project.



Be prepared for your goals to evolve based on patient partners' input. If there is no room for new direction in a project, consider where there is the opportunity for patient partners to make a meaningful difference, and focus your partnering efforts there. If possible, have early conversations with patient partners to discuss how their goals align with the project's goals.



Make sure your patient partnering sessions are accessible. If patient partners aren't showing up, you might be asking too much of them, in too short a timeframe, or in a way that makes it difficult for them to participate. Vary the ways you communicate and meet with each other – email, telephone, teleconference, and in-person meetings are all useful ways to engage, if done well.



Give your patient partners the supports they need to take part. This includes providing all meeting information in advance of meeting, sharing contact information for all committee members, providing nametags if meeting in person, and making sure they know the roles and responsibilities of the staff at the table, and actively inviting them to contribute their ideas throughout a project. If you provide the basic supports for active participation, patient partners will have a good basis on which to contribute.



Perform regular check-ins with your patient partners, both anonymously and directly, to ask how you can help improve their experience. Make it safe and easy for patient partners to give honest feedback - it will give you the chance to adjust or improve the way you're partnering with patients before any major issues occur.

“An organization should be able to brainstorm with patient partners about potential solutions to problems – let the thoughts run – and create a safe space for new ideas.” – Patient Partner



Resources

There is no one-size-fits-all method to partnering with patients, so you can be creative about how you'd like to work together. Here are some popular options:

READ

All projects have the potential to be made better with patient involvement, but there are ways you can prioritize which projects to start with. Here is a guide on how to choose meaningful projects for patient partnering:

READ



you want to kick up your communication with patient partners during a project...

Try this!



Tell patient partners what you've done or will do with the information they've shared with you, and on the impact of the project they were involved in. By linking input to action, patient partners can see that they made a difference. Also, let patient partners know when their ideas and suggestions align with what others are saying on the topic.



Be transparent if you decided not to follow a suggestion and share your reasons why. Frame the patient partner's perspective within the context of the bigger plan, and how the information could guide the next phase of work. Even if you didn't use the input that was given, patient partners should know they've been heard.



If the project has been paused, still give an update. An update even when there's no new information reassures patient partners you haven't forgotten about them and builds trust through transparency.



Say thank you! Not just at the end, but along the partnership journey as well. A simple thank-you goes a long way to recognizing the work that patient partners contributed to the project, and make them more likely to partner with your organization in the future.



Resources

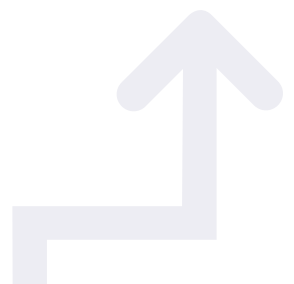
If you aren't sure how to close the loop on projects where you've used patient partner input, these email templates can help:

[READ](#)

Looking for more information on how to partner with patients in quality improvement work? See a larger and more comprehensive set of tips to use:

[READ](#)

“When patients can see what was discussed at meetings in the final document, it's obvious our voices have been heard and our ideas have been taken into account.” – Patient Partner



Want even more?

We have a whole resource hub dedicated to helping you partner meaningfully with patients:

VIEW



Resources for Health Care Providers www.hqontario.ca/Patient-Partnering/Patient-Partnering-Tools-and-Resources/Resources-for-Health-Care-Providers

About this resource

This guide was created by Health Quality Ontario and is based on advice and best practices used by health care professionals and patient partners across Ontario, with direction from Health Quality Ontario's Patient, Family and Public Advisors Council.

Health Quality Ontario is grateful for our partners' time and contributions and pleased to support peer to peer learning through resources like this guide.

Health Quality Ontario
130 Bloor Street West, 10th Floor
Toronto, ON M5S 1N5
Telephone: 416-323-6868
Toll-free: 1-866-623-6868
Email: info@hqontario.ca
Website: www.hqontario.ca

ISBN 978-1-4868-3442-6 (PDF)

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2019