

Accreditation and Continuous Quality Improvement in ACCHOs

Summary

To conduct their day to day business, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) must have accreditation under the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners Standards (5th Edition). Those ACCHOs that offer extended services such as aged care or early childhood education have additional accreditation requirements. Gaining accreditation establishes ACCHOs as well-functioning and professional organisations yet creates considerable staffing pressures and financial burden in ACCHOs.

ACCHOs consistently review their programs and services to look for ways to improve the care they provide. Consulting with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is fundamental to the continuous quality improvement (CQI) process. CQI processes include collecting and analysing relevant data to identify what is and isn't working, designing and implementing improvements where necessary, and then monitoring and evaluating whether improved processes and outcomes are achieved over time. CQI is a whole-of-organisation approach with processes integrated within all teams and programs and embedded within the organisational culture of ACCHOs.

Accreditation Outcomes

Accreditation processes are a value adding mechanism for the ACCHO sector ensuring CQI processes and clear policies and procedures to promote client safety and quality care are in place. Accreditation provides independent and external recognition that ACCHOs are well-functioning and professional organisations.

Accreditation Enablers

Common enablers include an ongoing approach to accreditation led by the ACCHO Board of Directors and executive, workforce capacity across the organisation, a thorough understanding of the Standards, and a good relationship and open communication with accrediting bodies.

Accreditation Challenges

Accreditation challenges relate to staff workload, resourcing, workforce capacity building and networking initiatives, and the need for interpretive guides across all accreditation frameworks.

CQI Outcomes

Effective CQI ensures ACCHOs provide quality culturally safe care tailored to the needs of local communities. Evidence of effective CQI is necessary for achievement of accreditation.

CQI Enablers

Common enablers of CQI include community connection and engagement, effective corporate systems (e.g. patient management system, quality management system), a corporate culture that promotes CQI as an everyday whole-of-organisation process, staff commitment and engagement in CQI, support from ACCHO state/territory affiliates, effective communication across the ACCHO and designated CQI Coordinators.

CQI Challenges

CQI challenges relate to workforce capacity building needs, access to electronic quality management systems, and constraints related to funding CQI Coordinators.

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Accreditation and CQI in ACCHOs: challenges and policy implications

The ACCHO sector faces several challenges in relation to accreditation and continuous quality improvement processes. The table below describes some of these challenges and poses potential policy level responses to strengthen the work of the ACCHO sector.

	Challenge	Potential policy level response
Accreditation	<p>Considerable human and financial resources needed to achieve accreditation against multiple Standards</p> <p>The process of accreditation is costly for ACCHOs who invest considerable staff resources to prepare for, host and communicate with multiple accrediting bodies.</p> <p>Interpreting accreditation Standards and identifying relevant evidence</p> <p>Determining what evidence to provide Accreditors to demonstrate compliance against Standards can be a challenge. The Interpretive Guides (e.g. Interpretive Guide to the RACGP Standards for general practices (4th Edition) for <i>Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services</i>) have been helpful, but not all Standards have guides for the ACCHO sector.</p>	<p>Funding agreements to adequately resource accreditation activities in ACCHOs that reflect the real time and personnel costs.</p> <p>Accreditation bodies to understand the unique characteristics of the ACCHO sector and provide dedicated training and support mechanisms for ACCHOs with fewer financial and human resources. Develop and implement Interpretive Guidelines for the ACCHO sector for all accreditation frameworks.</p>
Continuous quality improvement	<p>Funding for CQI Coordinators and CQI activities</p> <p>While ACCHOs benefit from a designated CQI Coordinator, many face challenges in funding the position, and in recruiting CQI Coordinators with experience in CQI processes and systems.</p> <p>Access to an electronic Quality Management System</p> <p>Smaller ACCHOs face financial barriers in access to electronic systems.</p>	<p>Fund CQI Coordinator positions in ACCHOs and fund ACCHO state/territory affiliates to support CQI mechanisms, structures, training and activities.</p> <p>Fund the implementation of the <i>National Framework for Continuous Quality Improvement in Primary Health Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 2018-2023</i>.</p> <p>Subsidise Quality Management Systems for ACCHOs to ensure that all services and staff have access to effective systems.</p>
Accreditation and CQI	<p>ACCHOs invest considerable time in training and developing staff in CQI and accreditation processes.</p>	<p>Develop and fund capacity building activities for ACCHO workforce to strengthen their capacity to coordinate CQI processes and achieve accreditation across multiple frameworks.</p> <p>Fund NACCHO and ACCHO peak bodies to host annual state/territory-based and national networking meetings of ACCHO Accreditation Teams.</p>

The content within this policy brief was drawn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led research undertaken by the Centre of Research Excellence in Aboriginal Chronic Disease Knowledge Translation and Exchange (CREATE), Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Equity, South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute.

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