Institutionalizing Quality Improvement

Improved health care requires more than a technical approach of tools and methods. Sustained improvements often require a change in attitude and sense of ownership for the quality of services provided by an organization. Many supporting factors are required to integrate quality improvement into the structure and function of an organization.

As shown in the box, there are eight essential elements that make up the quality improvement institutionalization framework and they can be divided into three categories:

- Internal enabling environment
- Structure
- Support functions

These essential elements are derived from a combination of the organizational development and quality management literature. While recognizing that every health organization functions within a larger environment that influences its ability to improve quality, this framework of essential institutionalization elements focuses on those that operate within the organization’s sphere of influence.

The Internal Enabling Environment

An internal environment conducive to initiating, expanding, and sustaining QI activities is necessary to institutionalize quality improvement. Such an enabling environment includes the following elements, each important individually, but also supportive of each other in a synergistic fashion:

- **Policy** - written policies that support quality through clear, explicit, and communicated directions/directives and provide support, guidance, and reinforcement for quality improvement as an integral part of the organization.
- **Leadership** - leaders who work directly and openly to improve quality by setting priorities, modeling core values, promoting a learning atmosphere, acting on recommendations, advocating for supportive policies, and allocating resources for quality improvement.
- **Core values** - organizational values are articulated, promoted, and practiced. These values emphasize quality of care, ongoing learning, and continuous improvement of services.
- **Resources** - sufficient allocation of human and material resources for conducting, supporting, and maintaining quality improvement activities.