



Guidelines for Assessing Health Care System Performance July 2000

In recent years, Canadians have expressed a loss of confidence in the ability of the health care system to meet their needs. At the same time, governments, health professionals, patients and the public are demanding greater accountability from the system and those responsible for how it currently functions. Attempts to respond to these concerns have highlighted the fact that the development and evolution of the system have not been based on assessment of performance or outcome measurements.

Through proper assessment, the capacity and performance of the health care system can be evaluated to identify opportunities for improvements in quality of care, health outcomes or both. These improvements should be based on sound decision-making using the best available information. The following guidelines have been created by the CMA in consultation with a broad group of stakeholders to serve as guiding principles for those involved in the establishment and ongoing development of health care system performance processes.

1. Recognizing that the ultimate goal of the health care system is to improve health, assessment of the system's performance and capacity must address structure, process and outcomes in the following domains: clinical services; governance; management; finances; human, intellectual and physical capital; and stakeholder perception and satisfaction.
2. Assessment of health care system performance must be comprehensive throughout the continuum of care at all levels¹ and involving all activities related to providing care.
3. The issues of privacy and confidentiality of patient information must be addressed at all levels as outlined in the [Principles for the Protection of Patient Privacy](#).
4. Assessment of health care system performance must enhance accountability² among administrators, patients, payers, providers and the public.
5. Assessing the performance of the health care system requires information that is reliable, valid, complete, comprehensive and timely. The information used for the purpose of assessing health care system performance must be continually evaluated and audited in a transparent process.

¹ Provider, institutional, regional, provincial and national levels.

² Accountability entails the procedures and processes by which one party justifies and takes responsibility for its activities (Emanuel EJ, Emanuel LL. What is accountability in health care? *Ann Intern Med* 1996;124:229).

6. An independent group³ ⁴ working with an advisory body (or bodies) composed of representative stakeholders should be responsible for overseeing the definition, collection and custodianship of data and the interpretation and dissemination of health care system performance assessment.
7. The advisory body (or bodies) must rely on the best available evidence, which may include or be limited to expert opinion in the areas of data definition and collection, privacy, analysis and interpretation⁵ in assessment of health care system performance.
8. In the assessment of health care system performance, and in particular with respect to the interpretation of information, the advisory body (or bodies) should place heavy emphasis on the viewpoints of relevant peer groups.
9. The processes of data collection, analysis, interpretation and communication to administrators, patients, payers, providers and the public should be systematic and ongoing.
10. The process of assessing health care system performance should be evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine whether it is achieving the desired effects on quality of care and health outcomes.

³ Without ownership or equity in the group being evaluated and without financial incentives related to the content of the evaluation.

⁴ Chosen through a transparent process.

⁵ Must include consideration of relevant legislation and regulations.
