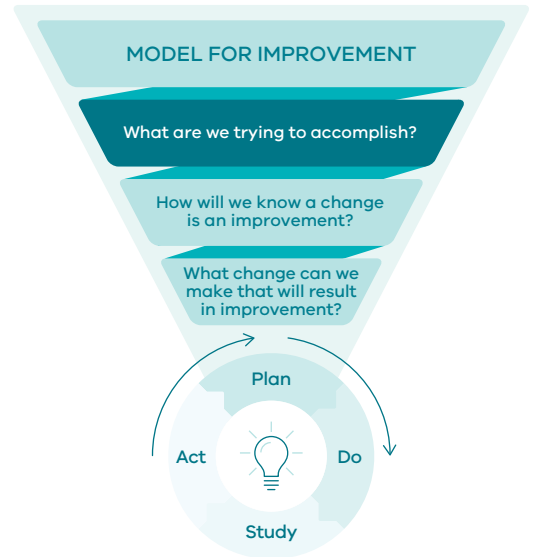# Aim Statements

Overview

An aim statement is a critical component of quality improvement work. It defines the direction of your work and is the tool to help answer the first question in the Model for Improvement 'What are we trying to accomplish?'

An effective aim statement is the cornerstone of improvement work and should:

- enable a shared understanding
- establish clarity of intent
- set out the scope of the improvement activity
- foster motivation and support for the change
- support communication
- improve your chance of success

MODEL FOR IMPROVEMENT

What are we trying to accomplish?

How will we know a change is an improvement?

What change can we make that will result in improvement?

Plan

Act — Do

Study

How to write an effective aim statement

An effective aim statement should clearly articulate:

- **What?** State the focus of your improvement effort.
- **How good?** Declare a numerical goal for the desired outcomes. The goal should be ambitious but achievable, and you should consider if can it be achieved in the desired timeframe.
- **By when?** Clearly specify the timeframe within which the aim should be achieved.
- **For whom?** Name the consumer group or focus population. Who are the primary people or groups who will benefit?

- **Where?** Define the process or system you want to improve. What is the scope? Where are the boundaries? What are the starts and stops of the project?
- **Why?** An aim statement should communicate the importance of what you are working towards. It needs to capture the 'heart' of the work. An effective aim statement needs to outline the benefit of the project to individuals and society, beyond a numerical value.

SCV Quality Improvement Toolkit

Which is the more effective aim statement?

> We aim to reduce unnecessary hospital transfers by 20% by June 2021.

OR

> We aim to reduce unnecessary hospital transfers from Rural Health Service X to metropolitan services by 50% by June 2021 to ensure more patients are able to stay close to family and local support.

Important considerations

Avoid: Aim statements should be outcome focused. Avoid making assumptions about the solution to the problem you are trying to solve. For example:

Outcome-focused aim: We aim to reduce avoidable harm to children undergoing appendectomy procedures in Victorian hospitals by reducing perforation-related complications by 20% by June 2024.

Solution-focused aim: We aim to implement an appendicectomy protocol into the paediatrics department by June 2024.

Collaborate: It is essential to work collaboratively with key stakeholders (including consumers) to develop and review aim statements. Consider who you might need to work with and the different ways you can work together to ensure your aim draws on the range of knowledge and experience needed.

Consensus on the aim can be more easily achieved if those involved are provided with relevant information and context early in the process. For example, relevant information may include baseline data about the process being investigated: e.g. admission rates, infection rates, and length of stay.

Review: Teams should avoid drifting from the original aim but be willing to review and intentionally re-focus the aim based on growing experience, testing results, and emerging evidence. Be mindful not to constantly change your aim statement.

Additional resources

To learn more about Quality Improvement you can access the following resources:

- SCV Quality Improvement Toolkit
- Institute for Healthcare Improvement website
- NSW Clinical Excellence Commission Quality Improvement Tools

Developing an aim statement worksheet

Use the prompts below to help your team write an effective aim statement. Use the checklist to double-check your work.

What? What is the problem or opportunity?

How good? By how much will you improve?

By when? What is the date by which you will achieve your improvement?

For whom? Who is the consumer or population who will benefit from the improvement?

Where? What are the boundaries of the process or system you're trying to improve?

Why? What is at the heart of what you are trying to achieve?

Complete aim statement: Combine the above answers to complete your aim statement.

Aim statement review checklist

☐ Is the problem or opportunity clearly stated?

☐ Do you know what the team is going to do about the problem?

☐ Has the team set a numerical goal to quantify the amount of improvement they would like to achieve?

☐ Do you know the calendar date by which the team plans to achieve the goal?

☐ Is it clear who will benefit from the improvement?

☐ Is the scope of the project clear?

Adapted with permission from the Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI).