

# Theory of Change

## Overview

A Theory of Change makes explicit what we believe we need to do to achieve our aim, and when, where and how we need to do it. Theory of Change focuses on the 'theory of knowledge' component of W. Edwards Deming's System of Profound Knowledge. It provides a roadmap for understanding the relationships between the interventions, outcomes, and broader aims of a quality improvement project. A Theory of Change can also help you craft a measurement strategy for an improvement initiative. You may have multiple theories of change for a single problem.



## Steps for creating a Theory of Change

Work through each part of the following statement to help you develop and articulate your Theory of Change:



### 1. In order to achieve this aim...

Clearly define the ultimate aim or desired change that you want to achieve. For more information on crafting an aim statement see [SCV Quality Improvement Toolkit](#).

### 2. We need to ensure...

Consider the high-level factors or themes that you need to influence to achieve the improvement aim.

### 3. Which requires...

Determine when and where your efforts will have the most significant impact and consider the specific contexts and settings where the change is most crucial.

### 4. Our idea to make this happen is...

Identify the key areas where change is needed to address the problem. Identify potential change ideas that you can test to understand their influence.

## Change ideas versus change concepts

When coming up with change ideas for a Theory of Change, people often identify broader themes of change (change concepts) rather than specific and actionable ideas that can be tested (change ideas). It is important to understand the difference between the two.

### Change concepts

- Broader and more abstract understanding of how change can occur within a system or context through a variety of specific change ideas
- General approaches to change that are useful for developing specific ideas for changes that lead to improvement
- Example: team communication

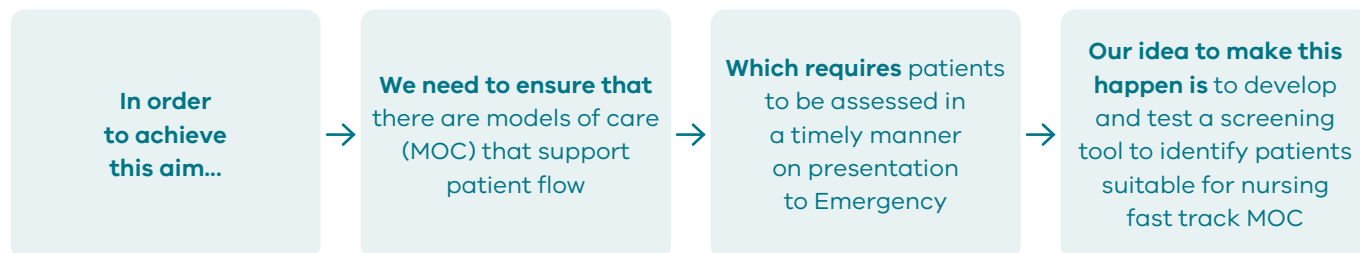
### Change ideas

- Specific, actionable and testable ideas for changing a process
- Changes you can specifically implement and test to see if they make a difference.
- Example: introduction of a weekly huddle to improve team communication

## Theory of Change example:

### Reducing emergency department wait times

**Aim:** Reduce the number of patients waiting two hours or more in the emergency department by 40% by December 2025 to improve patient care and flow.



## How to visualise a Theory of Change

A **Driver diagram** is a visual tool that helps build and communicate the overall Theory of Change for your quality improvement project. Driver diagrams articulate what parts of a system need to change in which way. This ensures that everyone working on improving the system has a shared sense of why. A Driver Diagram is made up of multiple theories of change. More information on driver diagrams can be found in the [SCV Quality Improvement Toolkit](#).

## 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](#)

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